

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹ but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ *Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, by the glorious resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you conquered death and opened the gate to eternal life. Grant that we, who have been raised with him through Baptism, may walk in newness of life and ever rejoice in the hope of sharing his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit be dominion and praise now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Alleluia. (Psalm 118:24 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Could there be a more glorious day than this? Was perhaps the first day of creation more glorious, when God simply spoke and created time and space and all matter out of nothing more than his words? Was maybe the fourth day of creation more glorious, that day on which God, just by speaking, created the sun, the moon, and the stars and flung them into the positions and courses? Were those days more glorious than this one? As awesome as any of the days of creation were, creation and everything in it will one day collapse and be changed by God with no more effort than taking off a coat. But this day will shine forever and ever in its glory and supreme importance. What about the Last Day, the day when Christ will come again with all the saints and angels, the day on which all will rise from the dead and face the judgment seat of God? Is that day more glorious than this one? Again, no! For apart from this day, that day would not be glorious at all. Apart from this

day, the Last Day would be filled with horror and terror unimaginable, and we would hear the voice of thunder say, "*Depart from me, you cursed, to that place of dread prepared for the devil and all his angels* (Matthew 25:41)." No, this day, the day of Christ's resurrection, is by far the most glorious day in all of time and all of eternity. CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! May we love and treasure this day as a day more glorious than our birthdays, weddings, our children's births, even the day of our death and our entrance into glory. All through Lent, we have been traveling through the dark and dangerous allies of our sin. We were able to review the commands of our God, even as we reviewed the passion history of our Savior Jesus. I suppose, one might say we have been looking at and for a very important question and its answer. "Who are You?"

Are you like Mary? Mary Magdalene was one of the first witnesses of the empty tomb. *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.* The three other synoptic Gospels tell us that other women accompanied her there. Mary sees the tomb unsealed and empty and she panics. She bolts and heads for the disciples and finds Peter and John. She has come to the only conclusion that makes any logical sense to her, "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!*", she cries.

Have you been there? Confronted with realities you were unprepared for, hardships you simply wanted to go away rather than deal with, perhaps hardest of all, have you had to acknowledge that your sin caused far more than an annoyance, but your condemnation? Have you had to peer into the face of death? In such situations, what is there to do but panic like Mary to run to anyone, anything that can help, except for the words and promises of God that He has given. Make no mistake, she had heard Jesus talk about His death on the cross, His resurrection three days later, the salvation of all people, and yet in this moment, in this shock, she remembers none of it and lets her mind run wild with accusations and conspiracy theories. She is hopeless and harassed at the thought of the loss of her Lord. Is that you? Despairing of hope, overcome by grief, running for your life from the panic of whatever situation that has come to you?

Or are you more like Peter and John, they run to the tomb having heard the panicked report of Mary. They both look around, though Peter, always the bold one, barrels in first. The account of John is interesting, *He (Peter) saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)* It would seem that both men understood that things were far too neat and orderly for this to have been a grave robbery. Both may have even understood from looking that Jesus must have somehow been able to do everything He said He was going to. He somehow cheated death. But they failed to understand the significance of this moment. They walk away, perhaps more confused and befuddled than anything else.

Has this been you as you navigate the ins and outs of life? It's not that you don't believe but it's hard to apply the truths when you're in the thick of it. It can be hard enough to keep the facts and figures of it all straight but to trust and rely on those realities when almost everything else tells you your defeated, tells you to give up and quit. To trust in a God who lives you and stands by you, most importantly who saves you. It's no easy task. No wonder they lock themselves away from fear of the Jews until Jesus unlocks their hearts once more.

Or maybe you aren't exactly like either of them. But touched by hardship, toil, sorrow, sin, you still find yourself overcome, confused, assaulted by the realities of a world rotting away in its own filth and decadence, running from death at all costs, trying to blunt the effects of sin, trapped in the snares of satan. In sin, we feel defeated and lost. Ah, but those are all pictures of what we used to be dear friends.

Stand in the garden with Mary for a second. There we find out that who we are is far less important than who He is and all that He does. Overcome with grief, tears blurring her vision even as the sorrow confused the reality before her, there was Jesus. Yes, risen and soon to be ascended and what is more, having achieved everything He had come to do. Jesus personally visits with Mary, speaks to her, in order to dispel the despair, the heartache, and the sorrow. And do you catch the new realities of who she and the disciples are as Jesus speaks? *Go and tell My brothers ... My Father and your Father, my God and your God.* He has drawn them closer than Mary, clinging on for dear life to her resurrected Lord. He has made them family, heirs of heaven, children of God. All by and through the forgiveness that He has won, purchased on the cross, sealed and secured in His resurrection.

And brothers and sisters, You see that's what we are now through the life, death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus. Brothers and sisters, what Jesus says to Mary and the disciples, He says to us also. Because Jesus lives, you and I have a whole new identity. Sinner used to mark us a children of nature, lost and condemned we were in deeper despair than Mary, in far more of a confused and befuddled state than the disciples but now we are God's own people purchased and won. Because of the realities of this day, because the tomb is empty and no one has ever been able to prove differently, because of the cross and all of its significance, because of the Spirit given faith that connects you to all of it, well dry your tears and open your eyes. See everything this means for you. As a child of God, nothing in the world can overcome you. Not trouble, hardship, grief, fear, pain, or death itself. Oh, this side of heaven, they are still fiercely fighting and no doubt they still touch our lives from time to time, sometimes it even feels like they will be with us throughout our lives. But Christ has come to you, come for you to draw you to Himself and the eternity He has won for you. In His means of grace, in His Gospel found in the Word and the Sacraments, He speaks our names. In Baptism, in the mouth of a pastor, Jesus stood in front of you and spoke your name even as He placed His own upon you calling you family, promising you victory. In Holy Communion, though we may stand before Him in shabbles, with tears of grief and remorse streaming down our cheeks, He comes to you, His body, His blood given and pour out for you for the forgiveness of all your sin. In His Gospel, in the glorious Words of the Scripture, he allows us to chase after our teacher, our brother, our friend and see with our own eyes not only the realities of all our brother has done for us but the why as well. That we might be people even as He is our God, that we might be family.

Go ahead then. Walk right up to Jesus this Easter season and every season. Walk right up to him through his Word. See the promises we have often forgotten but he has kept anyway. You will share in his glory. Nothing that he has will he hold back from you. And so, every step of the way come to his Word, return to his sacraments, so that through the whole journey of this life you may taste and see the glory that is His resurrection and the promise of your own. Yes, my fellow siblings, through the cross and empty tomb, you are heirs of heaven, because you belong to the Family of God. FOR CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUJAH! Amen.