

Text: 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:

O God, you made the dawn of this most holy day shine with the glory of our Lord's resurrection. Grant that we who have been raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. Alleluia. (I Corinthians 15:22)

Sermon Text:

Here we are, Easter Sunrise Service. The alleluias are ringing again. The joy is so thick it is almost as physical, substantial, and welcome as the smell of the delectable items which will form our Easter breakfast in a few moments. The first Easter morning, however, was anything but joyful. Good Friday still hung in the air with the rancid odor of death. The horrors which were on display at the Place of the Skull no doubt left the women and the disciples with very real Post Traumatic Stress to overcome. In fact, if you have ever had to deal with the death of someone close to you, or someone who has (and that likely far less gruesome and tragic than watching hours of horrific torture) there are some very real similarities in the behavior that we see in Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John. They all are so alarmed at a tomb that at first they seem to think it was raided. They survey the scene but fail to link it up with the clear words Jesus had spoken to them multiple times just on Thursday let alone throughout His earthly ministry. The parenthetical remark of verse nine lets us peer into the heads even as it lets us watch their actions through time, *They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.*

Of course, the signs are all there. Guards who had fainted at the reality, a tomb sealed and watched open and empty, the grave clothes not hastily left or gone along with the body they have covered but neatly folded and left behind, unnecessary, unneeded by the Lord of life who had left them behind. No, a full understanding of these days and everything that they would mean, well, that would take time to process and contemplate. So we will cut Mary a little slack as she stays behind and weeps, yes sobs at the tomb because she goes to the only place her grief-wearied mind could rationalize, *"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."*

I don't know why she didn't recognize Him when He stood there. Maybe it was the fog of grief that had clouded her mind, maybe it was the watery tears that were streaming down her face, maybe He concealed Himself at least in that moment not unlike He did later with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It doesn't matter, not really. What does matter is the loving way our Savior deals with her. *Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?* Both answers are so obvious it probably pained her to hear them. Jesus, whether people loved Him or hated Him was a popular figure. There is no doubt that news would have spread that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin) had requested the body, taken it down, placed it in his own tomb. There was probably pain in her voice, *"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."*

There was no pain in Jesus' reply, though there certainly could have been. Jesus had on multiple occasions said He was going to die and then rise again on the third day. He had only done what He had repeatedly promised to do. One wonders why they weren't all there watching, waiting, wondering if it would be true. Instead, we find out that they had failed to listen, failed to understand, failed to apply His words which had taken place before their very eyes. Oh, Jesus could have scolded her and all His disciples, but instead, only one word. It's all that's needed. He speaks her name, *"Mary."*

That one word does it all dear friends, in a moment the grief is gone, the sadness shattered, the tears of sorrow turned to abundant joy. Rabboni/teacher and she throws herself to His feet and puts a death grip on the One she thought was gone forever. Touching story right?

Why is that? Is it because we have all found ourselves in the shoes of Mary and the disciples? Maybe it was death that left us feeling overwhelmed and confused. Maybe it was another loss entirely. Perhaps a dream disappeared in the unpleasant reality of life. Maybe it was something we did, or said, or just the uncertainty and sinful realities of our own thoughts. Our foes are real and they so often prove that they can outsmart us and confound us at will. Sin, death, Satan they stick with us like the rancid stench of death that first Easter morning. And we should know better. It's not like Scripture as a whole doesn't repeatedly tell us that the victory is ours, will always be ours, is made secure by the same God who granted it to us. Oh, but maybe it's the constant barrage of living in this world of ours that clouds the mind. Maybe our tears and fears make it hard to see, hard to remember. Maybe, ach, our excuses are manifold and flimsy anyway. Jesus comes for the pain in our voices and the confusion in our hearts.

Jesus' voice pierces the darkness of sin and shatters our fear, our grief, our guilt. His Word, His promises Easter says it once again. Every one of them is true. Yes, though my sin had enslaved me to Satan and destined me for an eternity of death and hell, Jesus' holy precious blood has paid the ransom price to buy me back. Forgiveness is mine, yours through His sacrifice on the cross. Though that cost meant His death, His resurrection is the proof, the absolute reality that Father accepted the price and raised Him to life. Yes, Because He lives, we live ... freely for Him now and forever with Him in heaven. Because this is true so is the fact that the hardship and the trouble and even the pain are only light a momentary. God can use them for our good now on this earth (even when it is hard to see) and they will have to give us up when faith becomes sight in the glorious realities of our home in heaven. Yes, it even means He will be with us always, and sending His Spirit even as like Mary we travel into a skeptical world and proclaim this truth to others.

Ah dear friends, Jesus question in the face of the resurrection is a good one. Why are you crying? Why are you fearful? Is there something you are still looking for? Christ has Risen! He has Risen Indeed! Amen!!