
John 20:15-18

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to Me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”’

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that He had said these things to her.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Today is a day of rejoicing. All around the world, church bells will be ringing. We say that “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” All around the world families will be gathering, Christians will be assembling. And even those who claim to have no faith in Christ stop and celebrate something.

But there will be those who got up this morning and remembered friends and loved ones who are not with them this year. Perhaps later today you will go to a quiet cemetery and stand by a grave alone. In your heart, you may even talk to the one who is now gone and tell them again how much you miss them. If you have ever done that, you know why Mary was there.

She weeps because the tomb is empty. She is weeping over an empty tomb! What should have been good news broke her heart! We would say today that the empty tomb is one of the greatest proofs of the Resurrection. Yet Mary weeps. This shows us that evidence alone will never persuade anyone. Unless the evidence is accompanied by proper understanding and an open heart, no one will be changed. Mary had all the right facts but she still jumped to the wrong conclusion. We often do the same thing. When faced with trials and unexplainable tragedy, we often weep over our circumstances, when if we had God’s perspective, we wouldn’t weep at all.

And consider this. If Mary had gotten her wish, we would be the ones weeping today. If she had found Jesus’ body still in the tomb, we would have nothing to celebrate because Easter would not exist.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ “Mary.” He still knows her name! “Rabbouni.” She calls him, “My Master!” Think how much emotion can be conveyed in just one word: “Father.” “Mother.” “Dad.” “Mum.” “Son.” “Child.” “Daughter.” “Sweetheart.” “Dearest.” When Jesus called her name, he was conveying

many things to her. "I am here. I am back from the dead. I still know you and I still love you."

Mary, like the disciples at Emmaus, does not recognize Jesus until a specific act lifts the veil from their eyes. The disciples at Emmaus recognized him when he broke bread with them. Mary recognizes him when he calls her by name. Jesus utters just one word 'Mary' and instantly, her eyes are opened to who it is who stands before her now. In John 10, Jesus promised, the good Shepherd calls "his own sheep by name and leads them out... His sheep follow him because they know his voice." (John 10:3-4). Jesus simply calls her by name 'Mary' and her shattered soul is transformed, her broken world remade.

It was her own name spoken by Jesus which opened her eyes to the truth of the resurrection. When Jesus calls His sheep He always calls us by name. The call from Jesus is always personal. Mary falls at His feet and clings to him. She will not let go. She will not lose him again. Then comes the gentlest of rebukes. Jesus tells her not to cling on to Him because He has not yet ascended to the Father. He wants to teach her and us that He will no longer be known by sight or by touch but by faith. After his dramatic ascension to heaven there will be no more earthly appearances until He returns. Just as he promised at the Last Supper. Mary is to go and tell the disciples that Jesus is alive, and she obeys. The devotion of Mary. The emotion of Mary. The submission of Mary.

This is the day that begins in the garden. Have you noticed that a number of crucial moments in the story of our relationship with God occur in a garden? God plants a garden in Eden—God is a gardener!—and then places the newly created man and woman there, walking with them in the cool of the day. And all that disastrous business with the serpent and the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil...the wilful disobedience, the agonizing confrontation, confession and banishment...it all takes place in a garden.

A garden figures prominently in the stories we have been hearing throughout this Holy Week, the gospel accounts of Jesus' passion and death. After Jesus' final meal with his friends, the little band heads out across a valley to a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. John's gospel proceeds immediately to the arrest of Jesus. But the other gospel writers tell of Jesus' agonized prayer in the garden called Gethsemane. In the first creation story God drove Eve and Adam out of the garden. But in this new creation Jesus sends Mary out of the garden rejoicing. She is sent out to tell everyone the darkness has not overcome the Word made flesh who had lived among us. She had seen her Rabbi, and she now understood that she has seen "the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) "I have seen the Lord." (John 20:18) Her message declares to us the new beginning that God has prepared for all of us.

There is great power in the words of someone who can say, “I was there. I saw it. I heard it. I am giving you an eyewitness account.” A church in Bangladesh was showing the “Jesus” film to an audience filled with people who had never heard the gospel before. Little children sat in front and in the aisles. The adults stood in the back. As the story of Jesus’ crucifixion unfolded, there were tears and audible gasps. As the Bengalis watched, one young boy suddenly spoke up, “Do not be afraid. He gets up again! I saw it before.”

Today is a day of rejoicing. This is our message to a world overwhelmed with the reality of death. God has given us the answer. We can say to those who feel bewildered and heartbroken, “Fear not. Jesus Christ has come back from the dead. We have seen the Lord!”

If you are looking for good news, you have come to the right place – and here I am not speaking about worship in our building (although we should always be looking for ‘good news’ in a place such as!). Rather, ‘the right place’ we speak of is the actual tomb of Jesus – that is, his **empty** tomb.. The resurrection of the Jesus changed everything. All of a sudden, the cross that looks way too much like our world today, when we encounter violence, hate, bombs, and terror, now has a new meaning. We have hope that God transcends our Good Friday world.

This is the day... this is the day on which it all hinges, really. This is the day on which our entire faith rises or falls, the day on which it matters or is irrelevant, no more significant than any other competing philosophy in the great marketplace of ideas. As the apostle Paul says, “...if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.” If Christ has not been raised, “we are of all people most to be pitied” [1 Cor. 15:14,19].

Every day our lives aren’t what we expect. And many times all we see is loss. But God’s excessive love for us in Jesus has prevailed on Easter Morning.

Like Mary, Jesus calls us by name in our baptism. We are the disciple whom Jesus loves. And we believe the 1st person testimony of Mary that she has seen the Lord and that he is risen. Jesus changed her life again that day.

And Jesus says if we believe in him, we will have life too. You will receive the promise of eternal life. John 17 says that just knowing Jesus is eternal life.

No matter what gets you down, or what robs you of your joy this day, remember what happened in the Garden on the first day of the week.

Mary opened her mind and her heart to hear the voice of her Lord calling her by name. Even though she did not know it, the voice of Jesus was the only voice she wanted to hear. And her own name—that intimate knowing of who she was, in all her grieving humanity—was the only word, whether she knew it or not. She wanted to hear it so desperately she finally admitted the possibility, despite the illogic of it all. Do you have a desire—a deep, burning, restless

desire—for an encounter with the risen Christ? Do you have a longing to hear God call you by name, for God to know you intimately, a desire so great you are willing to open your heart and your mind to what cannot be proven or measured? Thank God, for this is indeed the day the Lord has made. You have come to the garden.

Friend, why are you weeping? Woman, man, child of God, what sorrow burdens your soul? Whom are you looking for? Whose heart are you seeking? There is One who has been looking for you, who has been calling you by name. There is a gardener who wants to plant the seed of resurrection faith in your heart. There is One whose heart is beating—his is risen indeed—and it's beating for you. This is the day. This is the day that the Lord has made. Alleluia. Amen.