

Easter
April 17, 2022
“Mary Magdalene’s Easter Witness” (John 20:14-18)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today’s text for this Easter morning is from our Gospel reading of John 20:14-18

“14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, 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, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ”

18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.”

Here ends our text.

Mary Magdalene. Today, we tell the Easter story through her eyes. We tell the story of Jesus’ resurrection through her tear filled- eyes of sadness and her wide-open eyes of surprise and joy when she recognized her risen Lord! We tell it that our eyes would also be left wide open with joy and amazement that Jesus lives!

Mary Magdalene. What do you know about her? Just little snips of her life here and there from the Bible, right? That’s why Pastor Goetz and I decided to include her in the list of the Lenten/Easter series of the lesser-known participants of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection.

Let’s start with her name – Mary. It was a very common name for Jewish women. To help differentiate this lesser-known Mary from other Mary(s) she was called Mary Magdalene or Mary the Magdalene. Why? Because she was from a small fishing town on the west side of the sea of Galilee called Magdala. In Jesus’

ministry in Galilee, the Bible doesn't tell us when she was called to be His follower. We first hear of her in the opening verses of Luke 8 in connection with Jesus' missionary work.

“Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, 2 and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.”

Mary Magdalene went with Jesus and the twelve and certain other women who had been healed of evil spirits through cities and villages as Jesus preached glad tidings!

Mary Magdalene had been rescued by Jesus of seven demons. Her life had been completely changed! She had received healing from demons and healing of her soul as she heard the glad tidings that Jesus was her Messiah! She had received much mercy and so she loved her Lord much! She gladly gave of her time and energy to then provide along with the other women out of her substance. Her life had been freed and now she freely gave to help the Lord who had unbound her!

We see this devotion not just in Jesus' earthly ministry, but at His death and burial she closely watches. Mary Magdalene would not leave His side to the bitter end. And then she came early as soon as the Sabbath had ended to finish the burial preparations that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had begun on Friday.

Mary Magdalene. She wasn't just a tag along. No, her name is listed first in the group of women who go to the tomb. In fact, each of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke mention her first by name in the group of women. She is the Simon Peter of the women, for she is a leader. And like Simon, reacts quickly without thinking things through.

For when she and the group of women approached the tomb, she recognized that something was off. The large stone had been moved from the entrance of the tomb. And rather than investigate, she immediately jumped to the conclusion that Jesus' body had been taken and she didn't know where it had been laid. So, she ran back to tell Peter and John.

Had she gone closer to the tomb with the rest of the women, she would have seen an angel as Matthew 28 tells us. And she would have heard the angel's message,

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

“Don't be afraid” was the message. Jesus who was crucified is risen from the dead! There's a very good reason why the stone is not covering the entrance and the tomb is empty. The rolled stone and the empty tomb are the first witnesses that Jesus is alive!

And had Mary taken up the invitation to enter the tomb with the other women, she would have seen two angels inside next to the burial cloths. And she would have heard this message as recorded in Luke 24.

““Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7 saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ ”

Why are you looking for Jesus here – among the dead? Why? Had she heard these angels ask the women “Why?” She would not have been asked later, “Why was she weeping?” For there should be no reason for sadness on Easter morning.

There would be no reason for sadness if only she had remembered what Jesus had repeated to His apostles, and which she heard as the group travelled in Galilee. The angel again repeated this prophecy to the women now.

‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ ”

This must happen to save all the world! Yes, Mary Magdalene had been an eyewitness of what had to happen – Jesus' suffering and death. But somehow, like all the others, she had not remembered the good news that Jesus would rise again! The angel recognized the women as those who had heard Jesus speak this prophecy. But the women, including Mary Magdalene and all the rest of the disciples didn't remember and recognize the words of the resurrection!

And so, Mary Magdalene had missed out on the angel's message. She now came back all by herself to the tomb. She followed Peter and John who had run ahead of her. When she arrived, they had already left and so she looked in -weeping. "Why?" That was the question the angels posed her with much compassion. "Why are you weeping?"

John had looked in, saw the linen cloths and believed. He believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but still wasn't understanding the connection of why Jesus had to rise again to show that He had won the victory over sin, death and the devil!

Mary looked in, but did not believe. She disregarded the Word of God that she had heard so often and instead believed her own imaginations. When one is left to one's own imaginations, one only wallows in the sorrow of this world's hardships and death. Do we often do the same in our moment of trial? Is God's word of comfort far from us in our moments of grief?

But, now it was Mary's turn to understand and believe. For the Lord sought her out! The Lord had compassion on Mary Magdalene when He had driven out seven demons, and again now in much compassion, He drives out the sadness from her soul. In her weeping, she didn't recognize who had walked up behind her. Her facial recognition wasn't working.

Who walked up behind Mary Magdalene? Mary didn't recognize Him and thought He was the gardener who possibly had moved the body. Yes, this person behind her did move the body, for it was His body that He was moving through linen burial cloths, and through tomb walls, fully using His divine nature now. As the first Easter day progressed, Jesus showed Himself to Peter, and in the next the moment to the Emmaus disciples and then He appeared inside locked doors!

But first, Jesus came to Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was the first person as Mark says in chapter 16:9 to see the resurrected Christ. What an honor and joy! But Jesus didn't use facial recognition at first, did He?

Today's Apple smart phone has facial recognition. It can recognize your face when you look at your phone and automatically open it up for you. Apple phones just had a new update a few days ago. Now it will recognize your face even if you are wearing a mask! Of course, the police have used facial recognition for years to catch bad guys. But Jesus doesn't use facial recognition to free Mary, He uses voice recognition!

“Mary”. He doesn’t say anything but her name - not Mary Magdalene for He knew which Mary this was. He cared for this Mary and loved her with great compassion! And Mary heard her name spoken the same way that she had heard it spoken from her Lord as the apostles and women went to many cities and villages.

The resurrected Jesus was the same Jesus! He sounded the same! He was alive! And He looked the same, including the addition of His nail printed hands and pierced side that He showed to His disciples later.

And her reply? “Rabboni” Teacher. She knew it was Him! He had taught her glad tidings. Jesus never forgets a name. He called you by name at your baptism and continues to call you through His word and sacrament to know that He has risen. He says to you personally this day, “Take and eat, this is My body, this is My blood given and shed for you! You are forgiven! The proof is my resurrection! And because Jesus lives, you also live now and eternally!

We’ve come to the end of our Lenten/Easter series of “Some lesser-known participants of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection”. Again, we thank Pastor Goetz for providing the outline for this series. We’ve heard the life stories of some like the owner of the upper room, and those who rejected Jesus like the mob led by Judas Iscariot, the false witnesses at the Sanhedrin trial, the crowd that shouted “Crucify Him!” One could pick others because every person has a story to tell whether as a witness of Christ or a detractor of Christ.

We decided to both preach our messages this morning through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. Not knowing what either one of us would say, there was bound to be some repetition, but that’s a good thing too. For the Teacher, as Mary rightly called Jesus, often repeated Himself to instill His messages to His listeners. We learn from the best Teacher!

Jesus had repeated the simple truths of Holy Week to His disciples that He would be betrayed, killed and rise again on the 3rd day. But even after much repetition, nobody remembered what would happen on the 3rd day.

So we have repeated Mary Magdalene’s story, because she is the first one that Jesus decided to reveal Himself to as the resurrected Lord. But, she is not the last! For her message is repeated to your ears this morning and you are called to repeat it to other ears who are bound in sin. Yes, we finish this series with the strong life witness of the first person to see the resurrected Christ, Mary Magdalene. And you are blessed by believing with eyes of faith, without seeing.

It just took one word in her ears to recognize her Teacher's loving voice. And all sadness turned to joy to see Jesus alive!

But even greater joy filled her that morning. For Jesus spoke to her the words which continue to echo joy in all who hear and believe them today.

“but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ”

“My brethren.” Jesus claimed the disciples in the locked room as His brethren as weak as their faith was. Tell them I'm alive and ascending to My Father and their Father, My God and their God. And He claims you and me as His brethren through our baptisms!

Yes, there are many lesser-known people in this world who still need to hear this good news. There are many that need to be unbound from their sin and sadness. There are many that need to know that by Jesus' death and victorious resurrection, He has removed the sin. They need to know so that can be called Jesus' brother or sister. And know Jesus Father as their Father, Jesus' God as their God! All need to know that Jesus' saving work is finished by His death on the cross! Jesus ascended because His work is done and He now receives all glory! He'll come back in glory to raise up all believers to take them to heaven.

Mary said that she had “seen the Lord”. And you have also with eyes of faith! You have now heard Mary of Magdala's witness, the Mary who had seven demons. The demons are defeated! Death is defeated, and sin is defeated! For Jesus is risen from the dead!

And as she has loved much, by sharing her resources and proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, you do the same! Show your love of your Lord by sharing this good news to the lesser-known people that are well-known by you! That by the power of the Holy Spirit, they too may be unbound of their sin, recognize Jesus as their Savior and rejoice in Jesus' resurrection as His brother or sister through faith! Blessed Easter! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)