

Let's Meet the Resurrected Jesus

Sermon April 17, 2022 – Easter Sunday

Scripture Reading: John 20:1–18

Golden Verse: *Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). John 20:16*

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.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). John 20:15-16

I welcome all of you on this Easter Sunday. This was the first day of the week on which, 2,000 years ago, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus who was crucified, dead and buried. This day brought a new beginning, not only in Mary Magdalene’s life but also for the whole world. This is why the Christian communities are celebrating this Sunday as the Lord’s resurrection day.

In our scripture reading, we see a grieving, heartbroken woman. In the scripture, we have only a little information about her. Her name was Mary and she was from the little town Magdala, which is on the Lake of Gennesaret. She had a deep conversation with Jesus who told her that her sins were forgiven. For that, she became one in the crowds who followed Jesus and his disciples.

Early in the morning, we see Mary heading to the cemetery, to Jesus’ tomb. She is a grieving, heavy hearted woman. She is grieving Jesus, who was good to everyone. He healed the sick, he fed the hungry and he spoke wonderfully about God’s kingdom. Now, after he was unmercifully crucified, he died and his body is lying in a tomb.

Since Mary met Jesus, he became the most important person in her life. With his help, she could tear away her sinful life. Through him, she received God’s grace and a new opportunity for a new life, and for this she loved Jesus dearly. This is why she hurried early in the morning to Jesus’ tomb, so she could be close to the person she loved the most.

These feelings, to rest on the grave of a person we loved a lot might be familiar to many of us.

Oh, what a great love and longing she had for Jesus.

We read that she went to the cemetery early in the morning when it was still dark. At that time, the cemeteries were not safe, but she was not afraid. Boldly, the love of Jesus guided her and took away her fear. In her heart, the love of Jesus shone. Therefore, she was not afraid in the darkness or from uncertainties.

When Jesus was buried on Friday evening, the tomb was closed with a huge stone, so the wild animals or people would not desecrate the body. Moreover, since Jesus spoke about his resurrection, by the order of scribes and clergy, the tomb was protected by Roman soldiers.

As Mary approached the tomb, she saw that the stone was rolled away from the entrance. She was so surprised that she did not approach the tomb and only saw it from a distance. Since she could not see the body, she assumed that somebody took it away, so she ran for help.

Being scared and confused, Mary ran to the disciples, and told them what she saw from a distance. She thought that somebody took away the body.

In this story, we see two disciples, Peter and John, running to the tomb, entering and then walking away, wondering what happened. This short story theologically is so rich that today we don't have time to examine it, but we will do so another time. Now, let us focus on Mary.

She saw Peter and John walking away, being amazed and wondering what happened. It is possible to go forward today, on Easter Day, like these two men, just amazed. But you can accomplish more as a believer like Mary who stayed at the tomb.

She saw the empty tomb, but she wasn't able to walk away from it, because her love towards Jesus kept her there crying. Her loneliness started to hurt her more and more. Jesus was gone and there was no one to share her sorrow and worries, and there was nobody with whom to share her pain. She had nobody to whom she could say a word, or to express her feelings. Jesus was tortured and killed. His

body was laid into the tomb, which now was empty. Mary was crying there, being alone with her pain and mourning. Even the disciples left, and she felt that she was not important to anybody anymore. What can be the purpose of life now since, without Jesus, her life became completely empty. She could only cry and, because of her pain and tears, she could not see a future.

Maybe these feelings are familiar to many of us. When the troubles are overwhelming and even those people are leaving us from whom we were expecting support and we cannot count on them anymore, the only thing we can do is to cry. In such a hopeless situation, some people would give up, saying: "There is no reason to live any longer."

I met many people who were not able to deal with their situations. They just cried because around them somebody or something died: their parents were dead, their marriage was dead, their relationship with their children was dead, their career was dead, and their dreams were dead.

Mary Magdalene was standing outside of the grave crying.

As she cried, she came closer to the tomb and she saw two white angels inside the tomb, where Jesus' body was lying. They talked to her as humans: "Woman, why are you crying? Whom are you looking for?"

When the stranger said this, Mary turned around and saw that person, but as she was sitting on the ground, it seems that she saw only that person's feet. Mary thought that the cemetery's gardener was standing behind her, and this is why she said: "I am crying because they took my master away, and I don't know where they put him. But if you took his body somewhere, please tell me where you placed Jesus' dead body and I will look after embalming his body."

How could Mary even imagine or believe that that stranger would be Jesus? She saw him being mocked, tortured, and crucified. She was there when they laid his dead body in the tomb, and she saw as the stone was rolled at the entrance to close the tomb. She could not even imagine that Jesus might be alive.

Then Jesus called her by name: "Mary." At that moment, Mary recognized the way Jesus pronounced her name. For this, she looked up to Jesus, and recognized Jesus, and with so much love and wonder she said one word: "LORD."

In Mary's hopeless situation, God intervened.

Jesus called Mary by her own name; then, she was able to recognize Jesus.

This is how God does his work today in our lives. He sends a messenger to us who talks to us about our own problems. Or we start to read a book and, through the book, God talks to us. Or somebody invites us to a service and, through the prayers, hymns or the sermon, God says something very important to us which can change our lives. Through human words, they hear God's words, and they meet the living and acting Jesus, and they will know about him more and more until they make a decision to receive him in their lives as their King and Saviour.

But we, as humans, also have to do something to meet Jesus. We read that Mary turned around and looked up to him. She was looking into his eyes, and she realized that this person was the same one who, three days ago, was crucified. In his voice, she recognized the crucified but the Living Jesus from whom she received so many blessings.

This is the turning point in her life and, based on her experience and conviction, she started a totally new life. This aha moment was very short in her life. Other people might need a bit more time until their faith in the Resurrected Lord can be developed and can get stronger.

This turning point is missing from many so called "religious" people's lives and this is why their faith is so weak or fragile. They practice Christianity as a tradition, but they are still missing that turning point, that aha moment, the eye-to-eye meeting with the Resurrected Lord.

Mary believed in God, but here at the empty tomb, she cried because she could not believe that there is life after death. After she saw the Living Christ, everything was changed in her life: her point of view about life and death, about eternal life, about her goals and her way of thinking. Everything had been changed and was surrounded by the new light which shone upon her from Jesus' empty tomb.

Dear beloved, it is a blessing if you know God, the creator, but you have to meet the Resurrected Jesus Christ as well in order to get the Easter happiness.

Today, I would like to encourage all of you to make the effort to know who Jesus Christ is.

The message we have to learn this Easter is that our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross and he paid for all our sin. This is how he became our Saviour and Redeemer. He lives and he can prove that he is above death and, even after our deaths, he is the everlasting God.

We can meet him today, here and now, if we open our hearts and if we invite him into our lives. He will never forsake you.

Please never forget: when you are in trouble, when you are alone, he is always there with you and for you.

If you worry about your future, please remember that he is a Living and Loving God, who keeps your fragile life in his hands. If you ask him, he will provide you the best beyond your imagination. Just look into his eyes and hold his hands everywhere he is leading you and you will realize you will be blessed much more than you were asking for.

Perhaps, one day, you may be waiting anxiously for a medical result. Remember that Jesus will be there with you, and he will ask you: “Why are you crying? Who are you looking for? Your life is in my hands, and I am with you.”

Perhaps, one day, while you are at the hospital searching for a physician. Jesus will be there with you, and he will ask you: Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? I am the blessed doctor, and I am with you.”

Perhaps, you may have to stand by a casket, and because of a heavy heart, you will not hear the reassuring words spoken. Then, too, Jesus will be there with you, and ask you: “Why are you crying, who are you looking for? The person you are looking for is already with me, in my everlasting Kingdom, where I have created a place for all those who followed me faithfully. Here, there is no crying, no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, only happiness and love. Here, you will find the person whom you lost now, but in my Kingdom, you will be reunited again.

Finally, on your death bed, as the last tear will fall down your face, before your heart will slowly stop, and your loved ones have to let go of your hands, even then

Jesus Christ will be there with you, and he will say to you: “Do not be afraid. I am here, the One who you believe in, who you loved. Now I am the one who is holding your hand and will take you to my Everlasting Kingdom which is prepared for you.”

Dear beloved, please do not leave here without meeting the resurrected Christ. Accept his words. He will say to you: “I am here for you. I died for your sins. I rose again because of you. I am here so you may believe. I will not leave you nor will I stray from you. I am with you to the very end of the ages.”

This, he symbolizes to us in the bread and wine. Bow down before him. Embrace him and say to him: “Thank you Jesus, my Lord and my God.”

Then, go and share your happiness with those who are still in fear and cannot believe. Amen