

I Have Seen the Lord! Easter, 4-12-09, John 20:1-18

This year's account of the Easter story comes from John. Matthew's account emphasizes that an earthquake rolled the stone away. The other two gospels spend more time with the disciples' reactions, but John helps us spend time with Mary at the tomb as she encounters her own emptiness and ours.

The name Mary Magdalene is one shrouded in scandal.

She came from Magdala, which was known as a wicked city. She was reported to have had seven devils cast out of her. How do you translate "demon?" Did she have seven major character flaws? or seven major vices? Any way we look at it, Mary was a woman with a past. Finally, don't forget that Mary was a woman. You have heard of some of the challenges of women in the New Testament. Mary would never be fully regarded as an equal, and her voice could never carry the weight of the male disciples.

Some say that she was the "sinner," who at the home of Simon the Pharisee washed Jesus' feet — you remember the account. If you were really a prophet, you would not allow that kind of woman to touch your feet. From this passage, some think that Mary's "demons" may have included prostitution, but this is pure speculation.

Although Mary belonged to another time and another place, she represents the emptiness that many of us, both male and female, encounter when people just don't understand who we are or what we need. If people could see beneath the surface of our lives, what surprises would they find? What despair, what remorse, what emptiness, what struggles would they find? I believe that, for Mary, losing Jesus was more than just losing the great teacher because he was, perhaps, the first person who had ever understood her jaded journey and had accepted her as she was. Mary had learned firsthand that she would never again encounter

a friend like Jesus. He had healed her of her issues and had accepted her as a friend. He had validated her very existence; and now he was gone.

So why did Mary go to the tomb?

Did she go to verify her beliefs or to confirm her worst fears? Peter and John saw the empty tomb and ran away believing. Mary, by contrast, lingered at the tomb, not knowing what to believe. When she looked into that same empty tomb a second time, she saw two men dressed in white. John tells us that there were angels. To these heavenly beings, she conveyed her worst fears: "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Her mind was already made up; Jesus was dead. From this, is it clear that she did not come to the tomb to verify a belief that Jesus would rise again; she came prepared to express her grief and to mourn his untimely death.

Are we any different? Have we already made it up in our minds what God will and will not do? Do we approach the difficult situations of our lives looking for a confirmation of the glory and power of God; or do we approach them looking for a confirmation of our worst fears?

***Do we go to the empty tombs of our lives
Where things are fuzzy and unclear
To celebrate a victorious resurrection?
Or, is it our mission to verify the existence of dead bodies
while we wish for things the way they were or
the way we wish they had been?***

***Mary was so disoriented that she could not recognize that
Christ was present.***

First, Jesus attempted to make himself known to her in a quiet way. He says, *"why are you crying?"*

While commenting on Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*- watched Wednesday at the parsonage- it was noted that a mother is always a mother. This was clear as Mary ran to her son when he fell from the weight of the cross, just as she had ran to his aide as a young child. Once a mom, always a mom...

"What's the matter?"

"Why are you crying?"

"Momma's here — It is all right. You don't have to cry."

Now Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene much as we would to quiet a fretful child. "Woman why are you weeping." "Whom are you looking for?"

Still, Mary could not see that the Risen Christ was with her. Can you remember a time when you heard from God, but it was a long time before you realized that you were heard by God? How many times have you found yourself running around in circles, looking for an answer to prayer, only to find that it was right there in front of your face all along?

Mary did what we often do, she responded with a well-rehearsed response: If I have an opportunity to ask a question, I am going to ask where the body is. So, standing there, with Jesus attempting to comfort her, she went into auto pilot. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away (verse 15)."

Finally, Jesus called her by name as he had done so many times before.

Mary!

With a tone that said stop looking, I'm right here!

Mary!

Stop looking for solutions inside a closed tomb!
Stop acting as though limited perception limits outcome!

Mary!

Her response? Rabbouni: *Teacher?*

Finally she heard and understood.

The same Jesus who had fed the 5,000...

The same Jesus who had walked on water...

The same Jesus who had opened the eyes of the blind...

*The same Jesus who had outraged the Pharisees by being
seen with tax collectors like Matthew and sinners like her...*

*The same Jesus who had raised Lazarus from the dead after
four days when all hope was gone...*

The same Jesus who had healed her of her afflictions...

Had risen from the dead — just as he had said he would!

*This morning when we encounter the empty tomb, what does it
mean?*

There is a mountain of difference between *he's not here* and *he has risen*. When Simon Peter and John saw the empty tomb, they believed. Mary stood at that same empty tomb and wept at her own emptiness.

The good news for us today is that God does not leave us to our own thoughts, even when we are full of doubt or despair. The lesson Mary teaches us today is to persevere until God's voice breaks through the fog of our lives.

Two of the disciples ran back to town
with a believing conclusion,

Mary stayed where she was
until Jesus cleared her confusion.

Will God do anything less for us?

Let us pray using the prayer found on the back of the bulletin...

Dear Heavenly Father,

We come with thankful hearts this Easter for the gift of Your only Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, who fully knows and understands. As we gather in faith, help us continually grow in Your wisdom and grace, and may the peace of Your everlasting presence live on within our hearts.

Purify our lives with Your truth, that we may always do what is pleasing in Your sight. May the beauty and new life of Spring be a reminder of our new life in Christ. Help us to share Your light with all those we encounter in our daily walk, as we continually strive to serve You in spirit, deed and truth.

Help us to see Your majesty in the gift of each beautiful sunrise and may it remind us of the light streaming from Jesus' empty tomb. Grant us the fullness of joy and a yearning to share this joy with others. Be with us today and remain in our hearts always and forever.

In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

Acknowledgements:

I Have Seen the Lord, Safiyah Fosua, freely adapted