

## *And Now for Something Different*

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Before I read the Scripture, I want to tell you about a guest pastor on Easter Sunday. She called the children forward and started the Children's time by asking them what makes this day special. One raised a hand and said, "Today we wear green and talk about leprechauns and rainbows." "No," the pastor said, "That is St. Patrick's Day. Can someone else tell me what makes this day special? Another raised a hand and said, "Today we set off fireworks and have picnics." "No," the visiting pastor said, "That is 4<sup>th</sup> of July." Now she was getting worried. One more time she tried, "Can anybody tell me what makes this day so special." One little boy shyly raised his hand." "Yes. Today is the day when Jesus came out of the tomb." "Yes! Yes!" the pastor said in relief. But the boy went on, "And he saw his shadow and went back in and there were six more weeks of winter!" Ok, I have a hard-enough time telling that joke with a room full of people so I am trusting that you are laughing at home. I guess it is all in the way you look at things. In today's scripture we are seeing The Resurrection through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. According to the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene was at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother and Aunt. She now goes to the tomb before daybreak. A reading from the gospel of

### **John 20:1, 11-18:**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,

“Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>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.’” <sup>18</sup>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.

This is the Word of the Lord; **Thanks be to God.**

The things were changing quickly. First came the rumors that they were out to get him, and then came his own predictions. But rumors can be overblown. The people who adore him won't let anyone harm him. Then things took a dark turn. One of his own sold out and betrayed him. He was arrested. They might detain him for a bit but he will be back. They just want to scare him. They kept him and things went quickly downhill from there. The nightmare got darker with each report: arrested; tried; Pilate offered to release him only to be denied by the crowd and finally the execution. No government is ever that efficient, yet they carried this out with lightning speed. It is over. He was gone, left in a sealed tomb. Nothing will ever be the same again.

She could not sleep; she kept playing the last three days over again, as her mind raced. How could this happen how could they have stopped it? Who is to blame, Judas, the Jews, the Romans? Where do we go from here? And so early on the first day of the week, she went to the tomb. It was the least she could do. She wanted to be near where they placed him.

According to John, Mary Magdalene, the one who Jesus healed of demons, goes alone that predawn morning to find the stone not in its place. It is Mary Magdalene who shares with the other followers that the grave of Jesus is open. It is Mary who returns with John and Peter to find that the tomb is empty. It is Mary who stays and weeps at the tomb while Peter and John return to the others. She lingers there. She stays because she has nowhere else to be. She stays because she can only find comfort being near where they laid him and now, he is gone. She stays because she does not know what else to do. As a result, Mary Magdalene is the first to meet the risen Lord.

In the verses of scripture, you can feel Mary's sorrow, and the loss that she has experienced as she cries to the gardener. “Tell me where he is. I need to care for his body.” You can feel the raw emotions when he reveals that he is not the gardener but Jesus simply by saying her name. “Mary...”

What follows is one of the more complex verses in this passage. Mary recognizes her friend and teacher and with every fiber of her being, Mary wants to hold and be held by Jesus who was lost to her but is found. Jesus says “No, don’t do it Mary.” Jesus says. “No, not yet.” Things are different now. In a normal Easter, this would not be the focus of this day. In a typical Easter Sunday, I would gloss over this verse and save it for an in-depth Bible Study on the book of John. On any other Easter, our focus would not stop at Jesus’ no to Mary but would move onward to all the yeses of this day. Christ has risen, He has risen indeed! Oh, Death where is your victory Oh Death where is your sting? But we are not celebrating a typical Easter. This is not normal by any sense of the word. So, on this day we cannot physically touch our grown children, we cannot sooth our elderly parent with a hug, we cannot cuddle with our grandchildren. What comes so naturally to us, to touch and connect with each other, we cannot do this day. We hear Jesus’s no to Mary with more force than usual. Today, this Easter day more than any other, we know how Mary feels. In her is a swirling mixture of disbelief, joy, and confusion. All she wants to do is hold on to Jesus and Jesus gently but firmly says “No, not yet.”

We know what that is like. Families and friends finding ways to connect between glass windows and from balconies, and computer screens. Sharing words of love in any way we can while being six feet apart. Mary, we know at this moment when you recognize your Lord and you cannot touch him. We know!

But let us not have Jesus’ “No,” be the word of today. For as Jesus says to Mary not yet, the no may not be now, but in God’s time. In God’s way we will never be apart. God has done the impossible; God has defeated death once and for all. The victory is here. It is here with us. The tomb is empty Alleluia! Hope is not lost. But for today, for this day, we embrace the joy and do the best we can.

Because of the resurrection, the world is changed forever. The story does not end in death. As the risen Jesus is standing there before Mary, things are not the way they have always been. A new way is opening up for her and for all who believe. Jesus instructs her to tell the others that she in fact has seen the Lord.

Today, wherever we are, scattered throughout the world, we isolate ourselves for the sake of others. We seek to understand the *nos* and the *don’ts* and the *cancelled until further notice* in our lives. We realize we are in such a new place that the only way forward is to go in faith. Our world is changed, and we are

changed. We are not certain where this will lead. We may be stronger more resilient, we may be flailing and lost. The only way we can move onward is by faith. The question for today is where do you place your faith? Can you place your faith in wealth or power? We see through the tumble of the stock market that the virus attacks both the powerful and the vulnerable. Some will find that faith in those things will have little grounding.

Do we place our faith in legislatures who say, “Sure go ahead. It is Easter. Come together, the virus wouldn’t dare infect you on Easter.” Some will put their faith in the legislatures and will reap the consequences of infecting themselves and others. Will we place our faith in hoarding all that we can so that we are protected and it is everyone for themselves? Some do. Today as we walk with Mary Magdalene and approach the empty tomb in wonder, we place our faith in God, who does not magically lift us above the crisis. We place our faith in God who sometimes says, “No you cannot get everything you want.” Placing our faith in God, who walks with us, cries with us and surrounds us with love, is the choice that is everlasting.

Let today become your resurrection day. Stand with Mary Magdalene saying “Lord, yes you are here with me.” There are many things that cannot happen today. I look out at this empty church but I know I know God is with me as God is with each of you, because nothing, nothing can separate us, not even death itself. Thanks be to God Alleluia. Amen