

“I Have Seen the Lord”

Sunday, April 16, 2017

Easter Sunday – Sanctuary Services

 **John 20:1-18 (NRSV)**

The Resurrection of Jesus

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.

So, she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”*

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’

head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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.

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.*”

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

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.”*

Jesus said to her, *“Mary!”*

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, *“Rabbouni!”*
(which means Teacher).

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.’”*

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 God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

“I have seen the Lord!” – This wonderful realization is unique to John’s Gospel.

Matthew’s version of the story uses an earthquake to help explain what happens and to bring drama to the scene.

Mark and Luke focus on how the disciples react to the Empty Tomb and heavenly messengers who send them to Galilee to meet the Risen Christ.

John asks us to spend time at the tomb with Mary as she lingers in her confusion and confronts her own emptiness.

Let us pray...Lord, this morning we encounter the empty tomb again, *but also for the very first time*. Help us to understand the emptiness and the joy of realization. In Jesus’ name, we pray. **Amen.**

First, I think we need to talk a little about why Mary Magdalene is at the center of all the resurrection stories.

Who is this woman and why do the gospel writers include her as the central figure in this story?

What we know for sure is that she came from a village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee called Magdala.

There is some controversy over what exactly the circumstances were that surrounded Mary.

There is the idea that she was a repentant prostitute; though there is no evidence to support this view.

Some think she was a leader among those who followed Jesus.

Some speculate about whether Mary Magdalene is the same woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair; the Bible doesn't say.

Some even suggest that she and Jesus were married; *highly unlikely*.

When the male disciples abandoned Jesus at the hour of mortal danger, Mary of Magdala was one of the women who stayed with him, even to the Crucifixion.

She was present at the tomb, the first person to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection and

the first to preach the “Good News” of that miracle.

These are among the few specific assertions made about Mary Magdalene in the Gospels.

From other texts of the early Christian era, it seems that her status as an “*apostle*,” in the years after Jesus’ death, rivaled even that of Peter.

We know a little about Mary, but there is much we cannot know.

It is obvious though, that she deserved to be at the center of the Resurrection Story.

In Luke’s gospel, Mary was reported to have had seven demons cast out of her.

The “*seven demons*” indicates an ailment (not necessarily possession) of a certain severity.

Did Mary suffer from a serious illness or seven character flaws? We can’t know.

Regardless of the unknown details, Mary represents the humanity and sinfulness we share.

She represents the emptiness that many of us, both men and women, encounter when people just don't understand who we are or what we need.

If we could see others through the eyes of Jesus, what surprises might we find?

What despair, what remorse, what struggles might we find?

The story of Easter begins with great loss.

For Mary, losing Jesus was more than just losing a 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.

John's gospel causes us to ask the question,

“Why did Mary go to the tomb?”

The other gospel writers include Mary in a group of women who go to the tomb to anoint the body.

John has Mary alone, going to the tomb with no stated purpose.

We are left to wonder, did she go to verify her belief in Jesus, or to confirm her worst fears about him?

Peter and John looked into the empty tomb and seem to have no problem believing; they don't understand yet, but they believe and head for home.

Mary doesn't know what to believe and so she lingers outside the tomb.

When she looks into the tomb again she sees the angels and she confesses her worst fears.

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

At this point, Mary has made up her mind, Jesus is dead.

It's clear that she did not come to the tomb to verify a belief that Jesus would rise again; she came ready to grieve and mourn his untimely death.

Today, the question is: ***“Are we any different?”***

Have we already made up our minds what God can and cannot do?

Are we convinced that this ancient story is past and has no bearing today?

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?

Why did we come to the tomb this morning?

In the story, 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, *“Why are you crying?”*

Jesus spoke to Mary 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 right there with her.

Can you remember a time when you heard from God, but it was a long time before you realized that you had heard from 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.

Standing there, with Christ attempting to comfort her, she went into "*auto.*"

"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 for a dead body.

Mary!

Stop looking for solutions inside a closed box!

Stop acting as though limited perception limits outcome...*Mary!*

Her response? – "*Teacher?*"

Finally, she heard and understood.

The same Jesus who had fed the 5,000;

The same Jesus who had walked on the 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?

God has brought you here for this message and for this Scripture and for this story of the resurrection of Jesus and this witness.

And my prayer for you is that you will, now or very soon, by God's grace, say, **"I see."**

That's what Mary said, ***"I have seen the Lord."***

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**