

Easter Message  
April 16, 2017

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ  
Text: John 20:1-18

*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.*

*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.*

*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? Who 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.*

Grief hurts. It's early Sunday morning after the Friday Jesus was crucified. The sun is not up yet, but Mary Magdalene is awake. Sleeping doesn't come easy in the midst of grief. The death of Jesus deeply hurts and her bitter tears are not yet emptied from her eyes. So she gets up in the dark and goes to the tomb—maybe just to get close to him one more time. Maybe to get some understanding of why all of this had to happen. Or maybe she goes for one last good-bye. But she goes. And when she gets there, even though her tired eyes are blurry from so much crying there is still something she unmistakably sees. The stone is rolled away from the tomb. And now the excitement begins.

#### Run To Get the Men!

As the story goes she runs to Peter and the "other" disciple and says,  
*"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

The body is missing! Peter and the other disciple need to see for themselves, so they get up to go and *now* the race is on! The other disciple, the one the writer refers to as "the one Jesus loved" is the fast one gets there first and looks in, but doesn't dare go in. It's a tomb. Peter gets there and he does go in; because he's Peter. He looks around and sees only the linens. Then the other does come in, also sees the linens, and then they both leave, "Yup, no body here," and they go back home. Needless to say,

*They did not yet understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*

#### The Angels

But Mary Madeline is different than the men. She lingers and continues to process her grief. Standing there crying, she sees something else in the tomb. What's happening now? She sees two angels! Has there ever been this much traffic in one tomb?

*They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"*

Is she imagining things? Who are these two? Why won't they help her? The pain in the pit of her stomach is turning once again into fear. All of this has been too much. The heart-breaking loss of her teacher and friend, the danger the disciples now find themselves in as they hide in Jerusalem, the regrets and guilt over not doing something more to change the situation, the nagging thought that everything in the last three years has possibly been for nothing. Ah, the loss of a loved one has a way of tearing apart our insides. And now this. *Where is his body?* It was merciful that a grave belonging to someone called Joseph of Arimathea was made available for the body of Jesus. Usually people who were crucified were taken down after they died and left on the ground for the wild dogs. And they ask her *"Woman, why are weeping?"*

*"Why am I weeping?! They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."*

#### The Gardner

Her grief has devastated her. But someone else is there on the scene who has

been watching and listening. Something amazing has happened, and she is going to be the first person to see it. It's not going to be the high priests who see it first, it's not going to be Pilate, it's not going to be King Herod, it's not even going to be Peter or any of the twelve disciples. It's going to be her.

She turns and sees Jesus standing there, but she does not know that it is Jesus. Probably too many tears in her eyes, too much confusion in her pain, too much despair in her grief. Jesus says to her, "*Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?*"

She thinks it's the gardener. Must be the way he is standing there; he must be striking some typical gardener pose. The next time you see a landscaper, see if there is any resemblance to Jesus. Hey, you never know how or when he is going to show up. She says to him, "*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.*"

### The Moment

Then it happens. It's the moment she hears something she thought she would never hear again. It's what she has been longingly rehearsing in her memories ever since he was taken away.

*Jesus says to her, "Mary!" She turns and says to him, "Rabbouni!" (which is Hebrew for Teacher).*

*Yeah, he says her name; very rare in those times for a man to address a woman by her name. But this is Jesus, and those kinds of things never stop him. Ever wonder what it would be like to hear Jesus say your name? That no matter who we are, or how we fit in or don't fit in; that no matter what we've ever done there is one who is always willing to come along side and put his arm around and say our name.*

We are going to have to imagine that Mary is now giving Jesus the biggest hug he ever got. He says to her, "*Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.* Apparently, the cosmic plan is not yet complete. And there is something Mary now needs to do. It will not be good for her to cling too long to this awesome life-changing moment. She will have to give it away to others.

*"Go to my brothers," Jesus says, "and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

*Run! The time is short!*

### The One Who Brings Good News

Blessed is the one who brings good news. Mary Magdalene goes to the disciples with the bold proclamation, "*I have seen the Lord*", and she tells them all Jesus has said to her. Just like that, she is an evangelist and she is a preacher, with as much authentic experience as anyone to bring the good news. And on this day, according to the Gospel of John, she is the first to witness and proclaim the resurrection and that it is for real. There's nothing more to say today, but what lands on her is what lands on us. We are all evangelists; we are all ministers of one sort or another. We are the ones who bring the good news. The good news that death has been defeated, and everything Jesus has said is true.

He is risen!  
He is risen indeed!  
Amen!