

Easter Sermon April 4 2021
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Text: John 20:1-18

20Early 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. ²So 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.'
³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and 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. ¹³They 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.'
¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus 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.'
¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus 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."'
¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Prayer

Sermon

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark....

Early in the morning, on the first day of the week.

You know, *in the beginning...*

When the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.

Early on that first day, before dawn,

God was at work.

God's entry into salvation started in the first Garden, started all the way back in Eden, started all the way back in the beginning, and God has never given up on us.

In the beginning,

John's Gospel wants us to connect this Easter morning

with that beginning,

Early in the morning, on the first day of the week. In the beginning, that very first day. In the beginning was the Word....The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John wants us to know this moment in the garden,

this moment in the garden - is where earth and heaven meet. This moment in the garden is God's ancient story of creation and re-creation, life and new life, lived out in one eternal moment, early in the morning on the first day of the week.

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Early in the morning, on the first day of the week,

Mary Magdalene

went to the garden.

Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend, Jesus' apostle, among the last at the cross and first at the tomb, heart broken, weeping, but staying present (as Susan broke open for us a few weeks ago), staying present. Mary Magdalene comes to the garden alone, while the

dew is still on the roses, before dawn, before she knows, Mary Magdalene stands there weeping.

You know the night lasts until someone believes in the dawn. The night lasts until someone meets resurrection. The night lasts until someone hears Jesus calling their name.

Mary Magdalene hears Jesus calling her name. "He speaks and the sound of His voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing."

Mary!

She turns to the dawn,

early in the morning on the first day of the week,

she turns to the dawn, and calls out to him: Teacher!

The light shines in the darkness.

And oh how she might have tarried there, but

¹⁷Jesus 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." '

You see, Mary Magdalene was called by Jesus on that Easter morning in the garden, called by name and called to proclaim.

In the garden she is called to cultivate new life.

Called from grief to hope,

from hope to good news,

and not called for her own sake but called to proclaim resurrection hope to every student of her Teacher. Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend, Jesus' apostle, among the last at the cross and the first at the tomb, becomes in John's telling of it the very first person to proclaim the risen Lord!

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene proclaimed resurrection.

Dawn is here.

Love lives!

New life is here.

Christ is risen. Alleluia.

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I want to share with you the words of womanist theologian Wil Gafney. I imagine this is the kind of good news Mary Magdalene shared with Jesus' followers, and I know it is our good news this Easter morning: "The love of God incarnate... transcends the evil and brokenness of this world—betrayal and abandonment, empire and occupation, torture and execution, even death itself. God's love is real, tangible and present. Jesus is God's love, poured into this world, this crucified and crucifying world. God's love is also poured into us. And God's love is powerful. God's love is stronger than death...The loving, liberating, life-giving relationship God began with us at the moment of our creation transcends death. This is the good news."¹

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If this is the good news, you can't hold on to it for yourself.

Early in the morning, before the dawn, you've got to anticipate resurrection. Anticipate it

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But don't assume you know all about it, ready yourself for it.

Practice resurrection. Study it. Sing the Easter hymns at the top of your lungs. Read the story. Watch for new life in your life. Watch for what transcends evil and brokenness, watch for God's love, real and tangible and present.

But don't just practice resurrection. Bring it into your heart. Imagine it in your life now. Imagine it poured into you and poured into this world.

Believe it. Believe resurrection. Don't hold on to it. Don't stay in the garden. Go!

Don't just believe it for yourself. Go! There are folks out there still on Good Friday, who need you to offer hope, share Easter, make it real, *proclaim resurrection*.

I am not talking about converting folks.

I am talking about giving people new life,

Just the way Jesus did,

By loving them into new hope,

By inviting them into newness of life,

By giving them something to believe when hope seems lost,

By giving them something to practice, when justice has been set aside,

By giving them something to anticipate,

When they've experienced what seems to be the end of their story.

¹ <https://www.wilgafney.com/2017/04/16/when-the-crucified-rise-a-black-lives-matter-easter-sermon/>

I'm asking you to do the work of Easter in a Good Friday world. I'm asking you to do what Mary Magdalene did. I'm saying, this Easter morning rise up and become God's hands and feet in the world as Jesus was.²

Resurrection:

Anticipate it.

Practice it.

Believe it.

And proclaim it.

Because someone needs it to hear this good news:

Though denied, love has become a new creation.

Though mocked, love shouts alleluia.

Though crucified, love persists!

Though killed, love rises.

Though buried, love goes ahead of us, into the world.

Dawn is here.

The light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness did not,

has not,

will not not overcome it.

Christ is risen. Hallelujah. HALLELUJAH. Amen.

² This paragraph is adapted from the words of the Human Rights Campaign's Out in Scripture Commentary including the words of Angela Bauer-Levesque.