

Easter Day C (3/27/2016)

Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:34-43

**John 20:1-18**

*Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb while it is still dark. Easter Day is marked first by grief and confusion. But the grave clothes are all that remain in the tomb, and Mary turns to encounter her Teacher standing in front of her. He calls her by name, and sends her to proclaim hope and purpose to all the others.*

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb “while it was still dark.” Maybe she couldn’t sleep. Maybe she wanted to make sure she would be alone at the tomb. Maybe she simply couldn’t wait any longer to return to Jesus, to the place where her beloved Teacher lay. Whatever the reason for Mary’s predawn trip, the Gospel writer of John insists that she went to the tomb while it was still dark. No glorious sunrise, only night. And, even the sight of the stone rolled away was no cause for joy. What might have happened to the body? Confused, Mary ran to tell Peter and the other disciple what she had seen. Their famous footrace to the tomb yielded no certainty either, “for as yet they did not understand....” No Jesus, and no answers. So, the two men went home, but Mary stayed, and wept.

Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark. Maybe it’s still dark for you this morning. We are dressed in our finest, we have surrounded ourselves with signs of spring – signs of new life, and we’re singing beloved Easter songs, but maybe it’s still dark. Maybe you’re plagued by an illness that won’t

leave you just because it's Easter. Maybe you're mourning the death of a loved one who is not likely to meet you the next time you visit the cemetery. Maybe you're entombed by a loneliness that you just can't shake. Maybe you're questioning whether Easter even matters in a world that is still disfigured by violence and fear. Maybe you've come to the tomb today while it is still dark.

It's easy to forget that Easter Day was marked first by grief and confusion. The trauma of the cross was fresh, and the disciples' hope had died with Jesus. The Sabbath came and went as a day to sit with the shock. And on the first day of a new week, there was no cause for expectancy, only the mystery of an empty tomb, like the hole Jesus had left in his friends' lives.

Then, through the tears in her eyes, Mary peered into the tomb. Where Jesus' body had been, there remained only his grave clothes. Why would grave robbers have taken the time to remove the linen wrappings?<sup>1</sup> And, surprisingly, seated there were two angels dressed in white. They asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Mary babbled an anguished response, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Then she turned away. In the depth of her grief, even the angels' glorious presence could not capture Mary's attention.<sup>2</sup> Even at Easter, it's not about the angels.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See John Chrysostom, cited by Barbara Lundblad, [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2807](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2807).

<sup>2</sup> See John K. Stendahl, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, 376.

<sup>3</sup> See Christmas Eve C (12/24/2015).

But when Mary turned, she encountered Jesus suddenly standing in front of her, present in the flesh, if untouchable. “Mary” was all he had to say to make himself known to her. And in a rush of excitement, she exclaimed, “Rabbouni!” which means my Teacher. In a moment, Mary was converted – her heart was filled and her hope restored. “Go to my brothers,” Jesus told her, “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 thus, on that first Easter, she became the “Apostle to the Apostles,” or, as one interpreter affirms, “the first resurrection preacher in the Bible”!<sup>4</sup>

Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark. **But her Teacher met her in the midst of her heartache and bewilderment, called her by name, and sent her to proclaim hope and purpose to all the others.**

**That is the meaning of Easter, dear church. We bring our darkness with us to the empty tomb today, but the living Christ meets us and calls us each by name. He is truly present in a word of peace spoken by friends and strangers, in a sacred story, and in a holy meal, his body and blood, given and poured out for us. In this way, he effects the new life he came to offer us, and for which he offered himself. And so, in spite of the**

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<sup>4</sup> Lundblad.

**darkness, we run to tell others what we have seen, and proclaim life, life, life to a world that knows mostly suffering and death.**

**It's a prophetic proclamation, but in the end, it cannot be stifled. To**

quote one of the most celebrated spiritual writers of our time:

“If... prophets are credible and true, not even death disrupts their calling. Those who kill them will often discover, to their surprise and horror, that they have succeeded in awakening many others and that the cry for a new world has grown still louder.<sup>5</sup>

**Dear church, Easter is the dawning of that new world. Alleluia, Christ is risen!**

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<sup>5</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 112.