

GOSPEL: John 20:11-18

The holy gospel, according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

[1Early 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 toward 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.]

11But 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 around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus 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." 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

My name is Pastor Courtenay Reedman Parker and on behalf of myself and the people of Messiah Lutheran Church, Winnipeg who gather and meet on Treaty 1 Land, grace to you and peace from our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

On this Holy Saturday we gather in vigil - in a time and space to keep watch... to stay in place to pray, to listen for God in the midst of death as we anticipate and wait for the new life promised to us in and through resurrection.

We get a glimpse in this time of vigil of the wideness of who God is through the birth of creation, and the chaos and disruption that soon follows. That even amidst life, there is sin and death... valleys of dry bones... but that even amidst death we find, God reveals to us and for us, new life. It is through both life and death that we encounter God... Jesus who comes to us to show us a new way of being in the world... who shows us a new, reconciled and restored world. Who reveals to us resurrection, new and abundant life.

While it is still dark, before the sun is up, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds the stone rolled away. In the midst of death and her grief, she encounters what looks like yet another loss. Another thing to grieve on top of grief. Jesus is not there.

How can this be?

I wonder if sometimes we overlook this part of the story. This part of the story where Mary Magdalene - who would have gone mostly unrecognized, unseen, whose word means nothing to anyone (why would anyone listen to, never mind believe, this woman?) is also deeply, deeply grieving the death of her friend and her teacher, Jesus.

And not only is he gone from her world, his body is not in the place where they laid it.

What should be the time for preparation for burial and collective and communal mourning cannot be because once again chaos, disruption unfolds, taking them away from what they have come to do. The men, who have come, presumably to give credibility to Mary and her story, return home, because what else can they do? Jesus isn't there, and besides, it isn't safe for them to be out.

But Mary stays.

And, looking back into the tomb, maybe to just double check she didn't miss Jesus in there, she sees something, someone else.

Angels.

"Woman, why are you weeping?" they ask

"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

And more than just her friend and teacher, Jesus is God's Son. God's very self. And he is not here.

Of course Mary is deeply grieved.

Aren't we all? When Jesus... when God is not in the place where we have be told and taught to believe God will be.

What do we do when God isn't there and we are unsure where God has gone... where God's been taken to. How or when or if God will be returned to us.

That is where Mary finds herself when Jesus appears, and asked again, *"woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"*

Only she doesn't know it's Jesus.

Mary doesn't recognize Jesus because she's not looking for him. She doesn't expect him to be alive.¹

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

What new life do we not see or recognize because we aren't expecting it to be there? When do we overlook God for the gardener or someone or something else because we aren't expecting God to be right here, right now calling out to us?

¹ Thomas B Slater Commentary John 20:1-18 <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/resurrection/commentary-on-john-201-18-4> accessed March 9, 2021.

Because the promise of resurrection, of new life, of Jesus being present for you (and me) here and now is as much true today as it was on that early morning on the third day.

And it can be - and is - challenging to see and trust that creation, re-creation... resurrection and new life are not only possible but present here and now even as we are grieving... even as we see the still physical signs of chaos... disruption... death all around us.

So God.. Jesus... calls us by name so that we would know and trust that God knows us. God is here for us, just as Jesus promised he would be. And then, with creation restored, Jesus calls Mary Magdalene, and calls us, not to stay in this place of waiting and watching - not even to stay holding on to Jesus... but sends us out. "Go and say to my siblings" ... go and tell the story. Go and live into and live out this good, life-giving and life-changing news.

I have seen the Lord!

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

May it be so. AMEN.