

“Early One Sunday Morning”
The Gospel According to John 20:11-18
April 1st, 2018

As the pastor introduced his children’s sermon on Easter, he asked the kids, “Do you see anything different about our church today?”

Little Heather quickly figured out the difference and blurted out, “It’s full!”

A Sunday school teacher asked each member of her class to write one sentence on “What Easter Means to Me.” One pupil wrote: “Egg salad sandwiches for the next two weeks!”

There was a major difference in the perspective of Jesus’ disciples on Good Friday when Jesus was crucified, to the state of mind and emotions Scripture teaches us were evident that first Easter Sunday morning. We must remember that two days earlier, Jesus was arrested, tried, sentenced to death, and crucified on a cross between two thieves on Mount Calvary. He died and His body was laid to rest in a tomb not far away.

That first Sunday morning following those events, Scripture teaches us - in John’s account of the gospel of Jesus Christ, anyway - that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark. When she arrived at the tomb, she saw that the door had been rolled away. She ran to find two of Jesus’ disciples - Peter and John (referred to as the one whom Jesus loved) and brings them the report that Jesus was missing from the tomb.

The three of them ran to the tomb, with John arriving before the others. He looked in the tomb, without going inside, and noticed the grave clothes lying there, but no Jesus. Peter then arrived and went in the tomb, seeing the grave clothes and the handkerchief that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. John also went in the tomb, and saw - and believed Jesus was the risen Lord.

That passage closed with the disciples returning to their homes, leaving Mary at the tomb. The day begins somber and reflective - sad, even sorrowful, but as the morning goes on, a hint of the anticipation of the unknown and unexpected follows.

We’ll read in the 20th chapter of John’s gospel account, verses 11-18.

The Gospel According to John 20:11-18 (New King James Version):

“11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”

14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (Which is to say, Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My

brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* He had spoken these things to her."

As it was then, so it is now this very day - early one Sunday morning - yet, that particular Sunday morning would change the world forever.

Notice first from our text of Scripture the several references to Mary Magdalene's weeping. Her weeping is mentioned twice in verse 11 - "But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb."

Then, in verse 13, the two angels Mary saw and talked with inside of the tomb mention her weeping - that's verse 13 - "Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Then, in verse 15, we see Jesus speaks of Mary's weeping - "Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

While it may seem obvious, **it is notable that we look at why Mary was weeping.** Looking back at verse 10 of this 20th chapter, we're taught that Peter and John who had accompanied Mary back to the tomb after she came to them with the report Jesus was missing, had returned to their homes. So, that Sunday morning, Mary was in the same situation she was in when she arrived at the tomb the first time earlier that morning - she was alone.

Then, when we look again at verse 13, her own words tells us more about why she was weeping. "She said to them (referring to the two angels in the tomb), "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Mary is weeping also because Jesus' body is missing from the tomb, and she has no idea what happened to Him. She had come that morning to pay respects to her Lord after honoring the Jewish Sabbath the day prior.

So, then, Mary was weeping because she was alone; and she was weeping because Jesus' remains were missing, and there was no sign as to where His body was taken. Interestingly, she didn't ask the *angels* where He was; but she did ask the next Person she saw - look at verses 14 & 15 - "Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Clearly, Mary did not recognize the Man as her Lord Jesus, she had mistaken Him for being the gardener; a reasonable possibility given the tomb was located in a garden. *Was Mary's vision blurred by her tears?* Possibly, though even through tears, we are usually able to recognize someone we are close to. Just watch small children who are crying run into the arms of a parent who has just walked into the room. *Was it because Jesus' appearance was somewhat different in His resurrected body than before He died - could that be the reason why Mary didn't recognize Him?* Possibly that is the case, though we cannot say for sure. More likely, Mary was single-mindedly looking for something else in particular - Jesus' dead body - and she couldn't see, at least at first glance, that Jesus was standing right near her. Mary came to the tomb early one

Sunday morning expecting to find Jesus there when she arrived; but she was coming with the expectation that she'd find a dead Man, not a living One!

Jesus speaks next - look at verse 16 - "Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (Which is to say, 'Teacher')." Mary recognized her Lord's voice, shouted a term of affection to him, and she must've run to Him and grabbed Him, even hugged Him. Listen to His words in verse 17 - "Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

Mary must've touched Jesus or held Him in some way for Him to rebuke her with the words, "Do not cling to Me for I have not yet ascended to My Father; . . ." *Doesn't that seem a bit odd from our perspective - for Jesus to say that?* We must understand that Jesus is correcting Mary's presumption that things would again be as they were before His death - and by that statement He is informing her that she hadn't even understood that He would return from the dead. "She had not yet realized that Jesus' resurrection was different. He was risen into a new life, nothing like the old one He had left, and Mary should not misunderstand." (Morris, 702) His words could be paraphrased, "Stop touching Me, you do not have to hang on to Me as if I were about to disappear permanently."

Crucified, dead, and buried, and now raised again from the dead, Jesus was in the process of returning to glory from where He had come. Instead of holding Him back, Mary must go and tell the others. And, Mary does just that, this time returning to the disciples not to say that Jesus was missing, but that He was alive!

What are we to take from this text this morning?

* Mary was alone and confused. But that changed with Jesus rising from the dead. Even if you are single or widowed or an empty nester, if you are a Christian, you are not alone! Our Lord has promised never to leave us, nor forsake us. He is with us, and He has called us to be a part of His people, the Church of the living God! Keeping one's distance from the church who is a believer in Christ is sinning; we are called to gather *together* for worship, fellowship, and service in His name. When Mary recognized her Lord, He commanded her to go tell His disciples. They were family; we are family!

* Mary was weeping because her Lord had died. And, we, too, weep when our friends and loved ones die. Oh, how are hearts hurt that God has taken home our brother, Chuck Inman, and that on the very same day (of the church calendar anyway) as His Savior, Jesus Christ, died. Many of you knew Valerie Carlson, whose life came to an end last Wednesday after school. **Yet, our Lord Jesus Christ is no longer dead** - on the third day after His death, the tomb was empty because JESUS IS ALIVE!

"Joy to the world, He's risen, hallelujah! He is risen from the dead!"

Harry Pritchett shares this story in *Leadership* magazine (Summer 1985).

Once upon a time I had a young friend named Philip. Philip was born with Down syndrome. He was a pleasant child, happy, but increasingly aware of differences between himself and other children. Philip went to Sunday School. His teacher, a friend of mine, taught the third and fourth grade class with Philip and 9 other 8 & 9 year old boys and girls.

Because of his differences, Philip was not readily accepted. But my teacher friend was creative, and he helped the group. My teacher friend knew that Philip was not really a part of the group. Philip did not choose nor want to be different. He just was.

My teacher friend had an idea for his class the Sunday after Easter last year. He brought to class 10 large plastic eggs. Each child got one. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assignment was for each child to go outside, find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would open and share their new life symbols one by one.

The kids ran all around the church grounds, gathering their symbols, and then returned to the classroom. They put all the eggs on a table, and then the teacher began to open them. All the children stood around the table.

He opened one, and there was a flower, and the kids oohed and aahed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. "Beautiful," the girls all said, since it is hard for 8 & 9 year old boys to say "beautiful." My teacher friend opened the next egg. There was nothing in it. The other kids, as 8 & 9 year olds will, said, "That's stupid! Somebody didn't do it right!"

Then my teacher friend felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Philip was standing beside him. "It's mine," Philip said. And the children said, "You don't ever do things right, Philip. There's nothing there!" "I did so do it," Philip said. "It's empty. *The tomb is empty!*"

There was silence, a very full silence. From that time on, it was different, Philip suddenly became a part of that class. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.

Philip died last summer. His family had known from the time he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny body. And so, late last July, with an infection that most healthy children would have quickly shrugged off, Philip died.

At his funeral, 9 8 & 9 year old children marched up to the casket. Nine 8 & 9 year olds, with their Sunday School teacher, marched right up to that casket and laid in it an empty egg – an empty, plastic egg.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has turned our mourning - our weeping - into joy! The tears we believers in Jesus Christ shed are to be tears of joy, and not sorrow. When a friend or loved one dies - who is a believer in Jesus Christ - yes, we may sorrow for a time, but we cannot stay there - our loved one is now with the Lord in glory! After Jesus rose from the dead, sometime later, He returned to glory, and Jesus is presently there - with a resurrected body - sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and all authority has been given to Him. He awaits the day when He will return to the earth - visibly and physically - in power and judgment.

The Lord is Risen!