

## **Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!**

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2009

This morning I want to look at the Easter Story through the eyes of one of the central characters, Mary Magdalene. In all four Gospels we are told that Mary Magdalene, along with Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna...and some other Women. Some of the Gospel writers do not even bother to name the women at all...which seems sort of typical for the age they wrote in. But most of the Gospels name Mary Magdalene, because she is a significant figure and has a significant experience that first Easter morning.

Mary Magdalene and the other women went on the first day of the Week, or Sunday. They had to wait for the Sabbath to end before they could journey to the tomb where Jesus had been laid to rest to tend to his body, to say the prayers and sing the funeral songs and mourn for Him. This was the first day of the week, it was indeed the first day of a new life, the beginning of a whole new world...as they say, the first day of the rest of your life. Mary slips away from the rest of the exhausted, sleeping disciples with these other brave women...her best girlfriends and they make their way through the dark streets toward the tomb. They have gathered all the spices they can find and afford to provide their Rabbi a proper burial. They have Frankincense, Nard and Myrrh. As they journey through Jerusalem's dark and quiet streets...long before dawn, they wonder aloud how on earth they will get the huge stone rolled up the ramp and away from the tomb's entrance. It would take a dozen Men to do the job, how will the four or five of them ever hope to do it? Well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it, I guess! Is the only answer they have.

When they arrive at the tomb, they are dumbstruck by the earthquake and the arrival of an angel in shining white! Do not be

afraid! Do not be afraid! The words echo in their souls. Of course they are afraid...the Jewish leaders had crucified Jesus! Jesus, who had walked on water and raised the dead...what do you think they were going to do to us...what could we do? Peter and James and John were hiding in the upper room with the doors locked...everyone was terrified! What did he/she/it? whatever...mean by He is not here, he has risen? The message was so incredible that they could not take it in. their grief and fear was so strong that they could not comprehend the message of the angel.

But the one thing the angel said she could understand...go and tell his disciples...that she could. Mary was always a good runner! So she ran. She ran like the wind and beat upon the house door to gain entrance and then upon the locked door to the upper room to wait the sleeping disciples...Peter, John, the tomb is empty...something has happened, they have taken Jesus away!

Peter is still Peter...and he takes off running full tilt! John follows and catches and being younger outruns Peter. John gets to the tomb and it is now daylight and he sees the grave wrappings lying there undisturbed and empty. Mary and the other women did not know that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who had risked much to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus body...had bought spices and had anointed the body and wrapped it in the traditional way...which meant about 200 pounds of wrapping and spices which dried hard.. Here the wrappings were undistributed but empty...sort of a "beam me up Scotty moment" ...as if the body had simply disappeared from within the wrappings and the head cloth lay folded nearby. When Peter arrives he runs past John standing at the entrance of the tomb and runs right in! Impetuous Peter! We are told both see and believe. But they do not yet understand. You can believe but not understand, can't you. They believed that Jesus was raised as he predicted, but did not know that they meant to them or to the world. The knowledge sort of made it into their heads, but not into their hearts or lives. They believed it was likely true, that Jesus body was taken by God or angels, or that it

wasn't there...but what that meant to them or the world was not clear to them... Sound familiar? It does to me. Many people feel obligated to tell me that they believe in God when they find out that I am a pastor. But their belief in God does not really make it into the rest of their lives...Sort of like believing in the value of Pi being 3.14...they believe it because they were taught it in school but have no idea what it means or what significance it might have.

So Peter and John return to the upper room, return to their waiting in fear to consider and think about the empty tomb and the empty grave clothes. And the story continues with a special moment in the life of Mary Magdalene. This story is shared merely to show that Jesus has great compassion and care for individuals...for Mary...and for me, and for you too. The Eternal Christ, the Messiah of all, the Risen Savior is never too busy for just one person....even one like Mary.

Mary had had quite the morning. She had gotten up early, had carried spices to the tomb, had encounter the angel, Run to Peter and John, and Run back to the Tomb. Mary had heard the Angel, and seen the empty tomb and the empty grave clothes. Peter and John had believed, although not yet understanding, but Mary did not yet even believe. Her grief was too heavy to yet believe.

She was frozen in grief. She was overwhelmed. She had suffered much and been forgiven much. Mark tells us that Jesus had cast 7 Demons out of Mary and that she had been living as if wild, and since her healing, she had been following Jesus and living as a devoted disciple. And Jesus had allowed her to do so. Her, a woman, which was unheard of. Rabbi's did not allow women to be disciples, but Jesus counted many women among his disciples (some of whom we listed earlier as going to the tomb with Mary Magdalene that morning). The Women also were there, along with Mary Magdalene at the cross. Mary had been possessed not by one demon, but by SEVEN, a number symbolic for perfection or completion, perhaps implying that she was totally possessed or controlled by evil. What had she done in her past? God only knows, and once she was forgiven and set free, Jesus did not

care and he would not let anyone else care either. He would not let anyone make an issue of her past...she was forgiven, the old Mary was dead, a new Mary stood before you now by the grace of God...she was a new creature, we are all born anew in Christ's love and grace, we get a fresh start. Mary's life started anew when she met Jesus, and it seemed to end when he was crucified...and she did not know how she was going to keep going without him.... She had seen his humiliation, his rejection, his flogging, his being taunted, struck, his being spat upon, his carrying his cross through town, his crucifixion, his death...she had witnessed it all...it is only fitting that she be the first, the first to see the empty tomb, the angels...but it is not enough to break through her grief.

So she was stuck. She sat down and cried. She did not know what else to do. Sometimes the tears just have to flow.

And something happened. First some angels come...God's messengers. "Why are you crying?"

They have taken him. They have taken him...tell me where he is...I will go and get him myself...I'll carry him myself.

And then something special, something tender. A voice she recognizes through her tears and sobbing. It says one word...her name MARY. Master? Jesus?

Is it possible? Is that you? Shock...amazement...it's true..what the angel said.. she gets it...the grave clothes ARE empty! He IS RISEN! LORD!

In an instant she understands it, he is risen...he is risen indeed. Death's hold is broken, sin's power is shattered, evil's grip is loosened! We are set free, we are made whole, we are His forever! He is with us always!

He calls her by Name, Mary. Don't hold onto me physically, I have not yet ascended to my Father and your Father... when he does, he sends us his Spirit.

So what does it mean to me, for us?

Everything. I meet with an old friend last week, and we talked about how things were going. We talked about delays in the building and about struggles in managing chronic pain...she asked me "how to manage to have hope"

Right here, in this story. Christ is Risen is more than a story...he calls me by Name. He knows suffering...he lifts me up, when I am weak, then I am strong...for in my weakness, then his strength come through. Christ is Risen, he is risen.

Mary Magdalene runs a third time to the Disciple's upper room, this time she flies through the streets as if on wings...her feet seeming to never touch the cobble stone streets. She flies over bridges and around corners as light as a bird, for her heart is on fire and there is a song on her lips...when she burst into the dark and closed room this time she shouts the good news...I have seen the Lord! He is Risen! There is HOPE. There is always Hope. Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed.