

1 Easter Sunrise – John 20

Woman, why are you weeping? Mary wasn't hysterical in her tears. She knew the source of her grief. She was well taught by her Lord Jesus. She knew him. He had rescued her from demon possession. She recognized his voice as the voice of God himself. He was her Lord. So when the angels asked her why she was weeping, she gave a simple, matter-of-fact answer, "Because they have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have laid him."

Mary was not like the band of soldiers who came marching into the Garden. When Jesus asked them whom they were seeking, they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." They were looking only for a man whom they were hired to arrest and deliver to the council. But Mary was not looking merely for a man. She was looking for her Lord. The source of her grief came from the fact that she could not find him.

Mary was Jesus' student. She knew him as her Rabboni, her Teacher. With the other women who cared for his physical needs, she learned from him. She had received the best education anyone ever had. She knew what she was looking for. More importantly, she knew whom she was looking for.

This is why Mary's tears were not in vain. St. Paul says that godly sorrow produces repentance, which leads to salvation, without regret. Mary does not regret following her Lord. She isn't like the two disciples whom Luke records walking to Emmaus who said, "We were hoping that he would be the one who would redeem Israel." No, Mary's hope was not something in the past. Her hope was still alive, even in the midst of her tears. Even though she didn't yet understand that her Lord had risen from the dead, even though she thought that they – whoever "they" were – had taken her Lord away, she was still looking for her Lord.

When we compare the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it is clear that Mary Magdalene was quite active. Let's review this just a bit. The other Gospel accounts tell us that Mary and the other women went to the tomb, saw that it was empty, saw an angel or two who told them that Christ had risen, ran back to tell the disciples, and even were met by Jesus on the way. When they got to the disciples and said that they had seen the Lord, the disciples didn't believe them. But Peter ran to the tomb and saw that it was empty.

John tells us that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark, saw that the stone had been rolled away, then ran back and told Peter and John, who rushed to the tomb. Mary also came back to the tomb with them. Peter and John saw the empty tomb, with the linen sheets laying by themselves and the headcloth folded neatly where Christ had been laid. They then ran back to their own homes.

It's clear that a lot of people are running around. Mary was initially with the other women, but she didn't remain with them. She got to the tomb before they did, and she simply ran back to tell these two disciples before the rest of the women saw the angels in the empty tomb. While the other women are running back with a mixture of joy, fear, and bewilderment, Mark tells us that

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they didn't tell anyone at first. It would have been during this time that Mary Magdalene had rushed back to the tomb with Peter and John.

So now, in John's account, when Peter and John have already gone home and the other women are likely making their way back to the rest of the disciples, here is Mary Magdalene standing all alone weeping. In all the rush, she is now separated from the rest of the disciples. She has one thing on her mind: *They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have laid him.* These words are not just the source of her sorrow and tears. They are also evidence of her hope. Even though it looks like a pathetic sight, she does not weep as one who is despairing. Because even if her Lord's body has been taken, even if he is still dead, he is still her Lord.

It is in that little word Lord where we find the strong foundation of Mary's hope. She had been taught well. She knew who Jesus was. He wasn't merely a man who got arrested and put to death. No, this man is the Lord who saved her from seven demons. Mary knew what worldly sorrow leads to. It leads to death and despair and regret. She knew what that was like. She knew the depth of sin and darkness from which her Lord had saved her. So even though she did not yet understand why he had to die or that he would rise, her hope was not gone. This man who was betrayed, condemned, insulted, mocked, beaten, nailed to a cross, and laid in a tomb was still her Lord. He was still her Redeemer, her teacher, the one who saved her from the depths of sin, hell, and despair.

When she saw Jesus, she didn't recognize him. Because we don't hope in what we can see. Jesus hid his appearance, making himself look like a regular gardener. She begged him to tell her where her Lord was so that she could take him away.

Now, this teaches us something else about hope. Hope doesn't see what it hopes in. Hope is determined to lay hold of Christ. But without the resurrection, hope dries up and disappears. Without the risen Lord Jesus, hope amounts only to wishful thinking. Where would Mary take him if she found him? Back to the tomb? What could she do for him? Mary had learned a lot. Her hope was alive. But her hope could not survive by her own determination. St. Paul says that if Christ is not risen, then we are without true hope, we are to be pitied more than anyone, and our faith is completely in vain. Mary's hope therefore could not depend upon her own pious desires. It needed to rest on the sure thing. It needed the risen Christ.

Before Mary's weeping turned into hysterical hopelessness, Jesus then spoke again. He said one simple word: "Mary." He called her by her name. Mary immediately recognized this voice of her Lord. Her hope found what it was looking for. She turned to him and said, "Rabboni!" which means "Teacher."

Jesus then proceeded to teach Mary. He taught her how she would continue to hope in him. Don't hold onto me, he said, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. You see, this is how we hope in Christ. This is how we hold onto him by faith. It is by him ascending to the right hand of God where he serves as our Advocate before the Father. From there he rules our hearts

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and minds by his Word, calling us by name in our baptism, feeding us with his body and blood, and strengthening us by the power of his resurrection in his gospel.

We don't cling to Jesus with our hands. We cling to him by faith. We seek him by hope. We cling to his Word as he intercedes for us on the throne of grace. This is why he died. This is why he rose. He has reconciled us poor sinners to God, giving us peace with our Creator. He therefore tells Mary to go back and tell his brothers, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Jesus gave Mary her confession. This is what it means to have hope. It means that you can speak of Christ. You can confess what he has done and what he still does to keep us in the care and favor of our Father. When we confess this hope, we are not put to shame. We confess the death and resurrection of Christ with the sure hope of what is to come. As St. Paul says, as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, which our Lord calls his body and blood, we are confessing his death until he comes. Do not neglect to gather together for worship, but encourage one another all the more as you see the Day approaching. Rejoice in the Lord always. Be anxious for nothing, because the Lord is at hand. This is hope. It is to gather around the Word of the crucified and risen Christ, to confess his name, confident that he who shares the same throne as the Father will come to take us where he is.

Mary Magdalene was the first one to see Jesus risen from the dead. She was the first one to confess this precious gospel fulfilled. She wasn't called to be an apostle. And yet, when Jesus sent her to his brethren, he was sending her to tell them what they were to preach. Her confession is the standard of all the apostles' teaching. Her hope is the hope of all the church. Christ is Lord. He is the crucified and risen Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. In him there is forgiveness, life, and salvation. When you confess this in the Creed and sing it in the hymns and the liturgy, you are following the example of Mary. In hope, you are telling your pastors what they are to preach. You are declaring the one true confession and norm for all true teaching.

Mary was taught by God. So it is for every Christian. He has rescued us from the realm of darkness. He meets us in our grief with the hope that does not put us to shame. We therefore confess together this ground of our faith and hope. Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed!* Alleluia! Amen.