

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2021

SERMON: "AND NOW THE REST OF THE STORY: MARY'S ENCOUNTER"

TEXT: JOHN 20:1-18

Do you have a curious mind? I certainly do – almost to the point of being nosy. I like to know what is going on and the end-results of actions and occurrences. I will be watching a movie or a television program and see that a regular actor has left the show and I immediately google the actor or google the question "Why did so-and-so leave the show."

I am a big fan of the Food Network, especially the shows where a celebrity chef and designer go into a floundering business and offer to help make it profitable again. Usually, by the end of the show, everyone seems satisfied, even overjoyed by the results. I like to google the business and see if they are still profitable and open. Often I will find local news reports about the business and the good and the bad of the experience being on TV. As radio personality Paul Harvey use to sum up his radio program, "And now you know...the rest of the story."

We have come through the 40 days of lent, knelt at the cross on Good Friday, and we have rejoiced at the sight of the empty tomb and the pronouncement "He is not here, He is risen...see the place that he laid." All too often we get to the end of Holy Week and we proceed with life as if Easter had never happened. We celebrated, but, like Christmas, we pack up our decorations and celebrations and wait for it to happen next year. Was there more to the story? What was the result of Jesus rising from the tomb? We want to look at that today and examine...the rest of the story!

Let's begin by reading our scripture lesson taken from John 20:1-18:

20 Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. ² She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple,

the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. ⁴ They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. ⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— ⁹ for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then they went home.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. ¹² She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

¹⁴ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. ¹⁵ "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

¹⁶ "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

17 “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

The question is often asked, “Where should an seeker/new believer start reading the Bible?” The answer given is that people who want to start reading the bible should start with the Gospel of John. Why? John’s gospel is considered to be the most concise portrayal of who Jesus is and what He came to do. John is very thorough in answering the question “Who is Jesus?”

The beloved disciple not only tells us what that the resurrection occurred but John, even more than Matthew and Mark, gives us a deeper understanding of what happened that first Easter morning. Matthew and Mark give us the information about the women visiting the tomb and Luke focuses on the story of Jesus appearing to the two unnamed disciples on the “Road to Emmaus.” John gives us in-depth coverage of Jesus’ initial appearances Easter morning.

Today we are looking at the oft dismissed story of the personal encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Was it an interesting yet unimportant part of the story or is John trying to show us something more? Could John be teaching us what it means to have a transformed relationship with a resurrected Lord?

MARY MAGDELEN

Over the years there has been a lot written about Mary Magdalene, and much of it is as factual as a story in the National Enquirer! Through the use of texts known as the “Gnostic Gospels” (false gospels that sprung up in abundance after the resurrection). It is through these so-called “accounts” and legend that would have you believe that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ wife. This idea was the basis of the movie “The Last Temptation of Christ” and the novel and accompanying movie “The Davinci Code.”

What do we know about Mary? Mary's name comes from where she lives. She is from the Galilean town of Magdala located north of Tiberias on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee. She appears for the first time at the cross in John 19:25 and plays a major role in our Easter morning scripture. Luke tells us that she is one of a group of women from Galilee who are devout to Jesus. We also are told that Jesus had cast out numerous demons from within her. Many have wrongly identified her as the "Mary" who anointed Jesus' feet in Bethany. John tells us in chapter 12 of his gospel that it was the Mary who was the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

John gives us in-depth details about the first Easter morning. Mary is part of a group of women that return to the grave. It is more than likely they are returning to the grave to finish the burial procedure begun in haste prior to the Sabbath. The stone in front of the grave was meant to be moved, to provide access to the grave for other family members to be buried within. The women were worried about how they would roll the stone away due to its size.

John does not include the information about the angel but using the other gospel accounts fill us in on what takes place. John is very specific about what Mary saw (or didn't see) in the tomb. Mary runs from the tomb in order to find others and tell them that Jesus' body is missing. At this point Mary still believes that Jesus' is dead and his body has been taken. "They have taken..." probably infers she thinks the religious rulers and authorities have stolen the body.

Peter and the "Beloved" disciple (presumably John) run to the tomb. John arrives first but doesn't enter the tomb but can see the burial clothes. Peter arrives second and enters the tomb and sees more details. John enters second, sees in full detail what Peter sees and we are told that John "believes" but nothing is said of Peter's reaction.

What does John believe in verse 8? According to our scripture lesson, they did not know the Scripture that talked about the resurrection. The same word translated "to believe" is used to indicate a robust, complete faith in Christ. It is very much part of John's theology as he writes his gospel to use signs as a means of knowing the reality of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the Living God. This section would

give us the indication that John believes immediately at the empty tomb, though he may not know the scriptures behind it.

Mary is given the privilege of the angelic visit. It is sad to note that the men thought Mary to be crazy (Luke 24:11). The words of the angel is the first clue that we take note of. “Woman, why are your crying?” It suggests that her sadness and tears are not appropriate for the setting. The message of Jesus was not dead and the body taken buy rather it is time to rejoice because he is alive!

Not only does Mary experience the angel but is given the privilege of being the first to experience the presence of the resurrected Lord! We are told that Mary does not recognize Jesus, thinking he is a gardener or caretaker. Jesus repeats the angel’s question “Woman, why are you crying?” Jesus then takes the questions to the next level and ask her “Who are you looking for?” She repeats her understanding that someone has removed Jesus’ dead body. It isn’t until Jesus takes the questioning to the next level and specifically asks her, “Who is it you are looking for?” It is time for Mary to leave the tomb behind! Jesus’ question is pointing her to a new reality. What happened in the tomb is not as important as what is happening at that moment in the garden. The past does not matter – the present is important.

Jesus speaks Mary’s name and she recognizes him! In a moment of recognition, Mary’s life changes exponentially and it becomes clear. Tears are transformed to joy. Mary, a disciple, becomes Mary, the messenger of hope and renewal. She runs and tells the others, “I have seen the Lord!” (20:18). Her message was not just that Jesus is alive, the angel’s words, but it is reinforced with the reality that she has seen Jesus.

NOW THE REST OF THE STORY

Are you living the “rest” of the story? Each year, many proclaimed disciples of Jesus celebrate Holy Week. We go through the expressions and the traditions, but what next?

It almost seems sacrilegious or heretical to suggest that we need to put the tomb behind us...but perhaps we do to fulfill our role as a servant of Jesus. The cross and the empty tomb provide us with an incredible sign of the identity and authority of Jesus. Why stop there? We say that we cling to the “old rugged cross.” We rejoice that the Lord is alive. Have we allowed the events of Easter to transform us from disciple to messenger/servant.

It is all about taking a well-known fact and internalizing it in our hearts and minds. That internalization demands an action (as does much of our Christian beliefs). It is one thing to say that we “believe” that Jesus died and rose again. We acknowledge the facts, but Jesus’ question to Mary forces us to integrate our daily lives with our beliefs.

“Who is it that you are looking for?” The question all believers must come to terms with. Good person or living Lord? If you say you believe in the resurrection how does it change your daily life? James 2:19 tells us of the reality of belief alone:

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

The cross and the tomb are only past historical events with no power if we do not know who we are looking for. As we internalize the fact that Jesus is more than a good man or prophet, that He is the resurrected, living, Son of God, our attitudes and actions will change. We will start to see the world as Jesus sees the world, in need of a Saviour. We will take our responsibility seriously to be the hands and feet of Jesus to all those around us.

May we take the facts of the empty tomb and be transformed by the “rest of the story” found in the one we are looking for...Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray...