

The Bethel Pulpit

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BETHEL

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at www.bethel-madison.org

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Text: John 20:1-8

It was still dark when Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb of Jesus. Her journey there wasn't pleasant. Her Lord had been brutally killed and she was going to his tomb because she didn't know what else to do. What would she do now that he is dead? When she got close enough to see the entrance to the place where Jesus lay, she was beside herself, the stone at the entrance was out of place, rolled away. The conclusion she jumps to isn't what you would expect. She didn't jump for joy singing praises to God for the resurrection, a resurrection like Lazarus experienced. Here is our clue that believing in Jesus is more complex than just hearing the story.

Mary doesn't go into the tomb because she is thinking dead means dead. Instead she quickly turns around and runs as fast as she can to tell Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loves about her discovery. "They have taken the master out of the tomb and we don't know where to find him." Like a couple of middle school children, Peter and the disciple Jesus loves have a foot race to the tomb. Eventually, both of them go into the tomb and seeing that it is empty, they go back home. Seeing the empty tomb isn't enough to lead to believing in the resurrection. Dead is dead. They don't know where Jesus' presumably lifeless body is and they don't care. They go back home like it's any other day after a crucifixion. Do they believe? The clues were there – the linen clothes used as the crucified were placed in the tomb were folded and lying there, but did they put it together? Did they believe Jesus was alive? I don't think so.

Mary is left alone in the garden at the tomb. Human emotion wells up; she begins to weep. Her love for Jesus, her grief wrapped themselves around her heart. She finally bends down and looks into the tomb, and there before her are two angels. They speak to her, "Why are you crying?" Mary Magdalene is getting a little closer to believing.

Again, she says something like she said before, but what she says this time is more focused on her own relationship with Jesus. She responds, "They have taken my master, and I, not we, and I don't know where they have put him." We see Mary Magdalene's commitment to Jesus. She turns; she looks straight at Jesus; and she doesn't recognize him. This resurrection stuff is hard to wrap your brain around.

Rolling the stone away isn't enough for us to believe. Just seeing Jesus isn't enough for us to believe in the resurrection. Jesus addresses her, "Woman why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" And Mary in her unbelief and desperation pleads with him, "Sir, if you have taken him, tell me where you have put him, and I will take him away." And then it happens, Jesus calls her name. "Mary."

Instantly, she knows who he is. He is her teacher her Lord. Rabbouni!" she exclaims and rushes to grab hold of him as if to make sure he is really there. Touching him, she knows he is alive!

Jesus announces his claim on her; she is a sheep of his flock, she can see that he is the Good Shepherd, and he is calling her now in to a new reality. She must have grabbed him hugged; she was holding on to him in some way and Jesus says, No – he has an important place to go. He must ascend to the Father, her Father now too. It's all part of the changing reality.

The resurrection was just the beginning. Before Jesus leaves Mary, he commissions her as his disciple saying, "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them I am ascending to my God and your God." And she went as she was instructed saying, "I have seen the Lord!" this resurrection is big enough on its own, but there is more to it. For those of us who believe in the living Jesus on Easter Sunday, and I think it's safe for me to assume all of you gathered here this morning, Jesus has called you by name. We are the sheep of his flock. Like Mary we have been

made new. We have been given an assignment by Jesus himself. We are to go to our brothers and sisters and tell them that Jesus lives. Believing in this resurrection involves showing others that you believe.

Now I can't help but notice there are some things missing in this commission Jesus gives to Mary. He doesn't say "Form a new committee." He doesn't send Mary to ask the church council's permission. He doesn't say, "We need a policy before we can take that next step." No, he says go, get busy letting the other people know about me, that I am alive, that death has been defeated.

We here in the church, self-included, get so distracted by things that take us off track. I know we aren't supposed to talk about this on Easter Sunday, but I'm going there. Jesus wants us to be about bringing the resurrection to all people. We regulars here in the church need to stop worrying about money, and start telling our brothers and sisters who aren't here that the resurrection of Jesus has something for them. We must commit ourselves to our own relationship with Christ. In the Jesus, God in the real flesh and blood, we see a God who isn't content to stand by and watch while children are gunned down in their schools; we see a God who calls us to action.

If you are at school or work or just out enjoying yourself, if you see one human being bullying another human being the resurrection of Jesus calls you to act, to do what you can to change the situation for the victim.

The resurrection has lasting power for us. The promises we made when we were baptized are based on this resurrection call from Jesus. We or our parents and our brothers and sisters in faith promised we would strive to actively care for and love each other.

When we let Jesus out of the tomb, when we fully believe in the power of the resurrection in our lives today, with God's love for the world, we can be a force of light in the world. Mary was the first new disciple after the resurrection. She answered the call of Christ and proclaimed his promise. Will we? Amen.