

Theme: The world is different

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we gather this morning to rejoice in the miracle of the resurrection: we give you thanks and praise for Jesus' resurrection, making us heirs with Christ in his resurrection, through Jesus Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

In John's gospel, the group of women who go to the tomb is reduced to one, Mary Magdalene. It was early on the first day of the week, before sunrise. This day begins at sundown on Saturday. In spite of the darkness, Mary found her way to the tomb and when she got there, she saw that the stone covering the tomb was rolled away.

In John, it is not the women who come to anoint Jesus' body. It was already done by Nicodemus. We are not told why Mary goes to the tomb. But John in telling this story knows the tradition that men were not the first to see the empty tomb.

The first thought that comes to Mary's mind is, "grave robbers." Grave robbers were common in those days. Mary assumes that the body was stolen. She did not go into the tomb. Mary immediately ran off to tell Peter about this calamitous event.

Another, an unnamed disciple, is with Peter at the time. They both run off toward the tomb. The unnamed disciple reaches the tomb first. He looks in and sees Jesus' burial clothes in a pile. It must have been like a teenager's room. He doesn't go in.

Impulsively, Peter doesn't stop at the entrance, he goes in. Peter saw the burial clothes. But he also saw the cloth that covered Jesus' face, rolled up and in a place by itself. Grave robbers would not have left the clothes behind. Lazarus came out of the tomb with all the wrappings still on his body. These have been left behind. Something different has happened here.

The unnamed disciple went in, saw the scene, and then believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Neither he nor Peter had put this news into the context of the Old Testament though. They do not yet grasp the significance of the

empty tomb. The two of them went back where they came from, leaving Mary weeping outside the tomb. They didn't stop to ask why she was crying. They just left.

Mary stays behind. She has grieving to do, and she knows it. She has tears to shed, and she knows it. And it is through those tears that she sees the risen Jesus. That is what moves me so deeply and touches my own experience. So often it is through our tears that we experience the risen Christ. Frederick Buechner says somewhere, "It is not the absence of Jesus from the empty tomb that moves us. It is his presence in our empty hearts."

Sometime, perhaps minutes, perhaps seconds, later, Mary Magdalene looks in the tomb and sees two angels. She is still crying. She is overcome with grief and sadness. I don't know if Mary saw an angel before or how she would recognize one if she saw one. They were dressed in white, sitting where Jesus' body was laid. Perhaps the angels didn't want to talk to the two men. They were there especially for Mary.

The angels asked Mary why she was crying. They asked the question that Peter and the other disciple didn't ask. They don't announce the resurrection. They are focused on Mary's grief. Mary told them someone stole Jesus' body and it is missing.

Then Mary turns around and there is another man standing there. It's Jesus, but Mary didn't recognize him. After all, Jesus is dead, right? Mary in her grief cannot think right. She can't recognize angels. She can't recognize Jesus.

Jesus also asks Mary why she is crying. What was wrong with Peter and the other guy? Mary asks him, if he stole Jesus' body to please tell her where it is. Mary was unintentionally very perceptive. Jesus *did* steal Jesus' body. Jesus is the grave robber. And it's right in front of her!

Jesus calls her name and she recognizes his voice. Jesus is the good shepherd and calls us by name. She says, "Rabboni," which means Rabbi or teacher in Aramaic. Since Jesus has yet to ascend into heaven, he doesn't want to be touched.

Mary is not to keep Jesus for herself. She is to share with others the good news of the risen Christ. Jesus instructs Mary to tell his disciples that he is going to God the Father. Mary does as she is told and tells Jesus' friends what he said and what she had seen.

I have not read this by anyone else, but I can't be the only person this has occurred to. And that is this: the beloved disciple is not a historical person. I am beginning to think that John uses this literary device of the beloved disciple to mean the church. We are to be the beloved disciple. We are to act in faith, belief, steadfastness, and most importantly in love. The beloved disciple is what Jesus wants us to be. John gives us the beloved disciple as an example to follow. That is why this disciple is not named.

The beloved disciple is to be each and every one of us. We are to be with women at the foot of cross. We race to see what Mary has said about the empty tomb. We realize what the empty tomb means and we believe. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus is the messiah. Jesus is the Son of God. We devote our lives to Jesus. We are the beloved disciple.

In his book [The Jesus Creed](#), Scot McKnight shares the moving story of Margaret Ault. When Margaret was just about to complete her Ph.D. at Duke, something unexpected—but quite welcomed—happened: she fell in love. She went on a date with a man named Hyung Goo Kim, and the proverbial sparks flew. But almost as quickly as the sparks became a fire, they were doused with water.

Hyung Goo informed Margaret that he was HIV positive. Needless to say, Margaret was devastated. In her own words, "I'd just met someone I liked, and we were definitely not going to live happily ever after. I felt like I had been kicked in the gut by the biggest boot in the world."

Still, she and Hyung Goo were married. In his book McKnight asks the question many of us would ask: "Why would anyone invite into the core of their being so much pain?" He then goes on to share that the answer unfolds in the rest of Margaret and Hyung Goo's story. He writes:

When Margaret was in graduate school at Duke, she and Hyung Goo loved to walk in the Duke gardens, and so knowledgeable did they become of its plants that they "supervised construction" of a new project. They walked

through each part of the garden routinely and had names for some of the ducks. In their last spring together, the garden seemed especially beautiful [to them].

Hyung Goo died in the fall and Margaret returned to the gardens in the spring where a memorial garden of roses was being constructed in his honor.

McKnight then points the reader to a series of quotations from Margaret's book *Sing Me to Heaven*, where she reflects on the days she returned to the gardens. She writes:

Where peonies were promised, there were only the dead stumps of last year's stalks; where day lilies were promised, there were unprepossessing tufts of foliage; where hostas were promised, there was nothing at all. And yet I know what lushness lay below the surface; those beds that were so brown and empty and, to the unknowing eye, so unpromising, would be full to bursting in a matter of months.

*Is the whole world like this? Is this what it might be like to live in expectation, real expectation, of the resurrection?*

Was not Hyung Goo's and my life together like this? Empty and sere, and yet a seedbed of fullness and life for both of us. He died, and I was widowed; yet in his dying, we both were made alive.

After quoting Margaret's words, McKnight concludes: Where does she find strength to grip such faith and such hope? It is found in [her question]: *Is the whole world like this?*

The answer, "Yes, the whole world is like this: the whole world offers us tokens of new life beyond death and disasters." It offers the promise of new life beyond the grave, a life of renewed love in the presence of God. Why? Because Jesus was raised from the dead.

We now pray: Gracious God and giver of all good gifts, we give you thanks for the gift of the resurrection, through which we see the world new; a world where death does not reign, where life is made anew, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Text: **John 20:1–18** (NRSV)

**20** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look<sup>a</sup> into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,<sup>b</sup> “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Gk lacks *to look*

<sup>b</sup> That is, *Aramaic*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 20:1–18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.