

John 20: 1-18 (NRSV)

- 1 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.
- 2 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."
- 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.
- 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
- 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.
- 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,
- 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.
- 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;
- 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.
- 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;
- 12 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.
- 13 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."
- 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.
- 15 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."
- 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).
- 17 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.' "
- 18 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.

My God, and Your God

Blessing to each of you on this Easter Morning!

I have dear friends who have lost family members in recent times. Others have lost dear friends, doggies, and families in the last year.

First, I pray that God's comfort and peace will be in their(your and our) hearts as all of us celebrate Easter in 2024. Remember, you have the hope. That the resurrection is God's promise of hope for all people.

On May 30, 2018, when I was living in the United States, I received a phone call from South Korea that my mother passed away. She had made a doctor's appointment, ate her favorite udon noodles with my brother-in-law, came home, slept, and passed away from a heart attack. I was so panicked

that I didn't have any emotions. I got the call at dawn, and I also remember leading the early morning worship service that day.

I wasn't in a position to go to Korea and attend my mom's funeral. It didn't really hit me, I just thought she was gone. My first concern was for my dad and (big) sister. As I comforted them, I assumed that my mind was at peace for my Mom is with God. Even after the funeral, and from the picture they sent me of the casket, I wasn't too emotionally moved.

Every person I spent time with and met told me that my mom was now with God. I used to be in the position of saying that to other people, but on those days, I was in the position of hearing it, and I was grateful for the people who said it to me.

That night, I was sitting in my study, alone, after all the people who comforted me had left, and my family (Ben, Luke, and my beloved wife) was asleep. And I realized, for the first time, that my mom wouldn't be able to pick up the phone when I called her. And I remember being overcome with a longing for my mom that I hadn't felt in a long time. I didn't tell people, but my grief was long-lasting. Sometimes it breaks my heart to realize that I can only see my mom as a memory now.

There are times when I look at food, or see a scene, and it reminds me of her. What gets me through those moments is the hope that she is now with God. In the midst of the pain of losing our loved ones, we still have hope. We think of them in the peace of God and the glory of God. We say that because Jesus already shared his unconventional love and the reality of the hope that brings to each one of us through the resurrection.

However, I realize that Mary Magdalene, the woman we met today in our gospel reading, didn't have anyone around to tell her this; "Rest in Peace"

She had witnessed Jesus' horrific death; everyone she met said he was cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). Her beloved teacher, Jesus, had become such a public figure that she could share her grief with no one.

She went to see the body of Jesus on Easter Sunday. Then she saw that Jesus' body was missing from the tomb. So, she went to share that disturbing news with the disciples. The disciples accompanied her to the tomb and checked the tomb.

Jesus' disciples, including Peter, were terrified by the events of Jesus' death and the empty tomb. Perhaps, as shown in the "A.D. The Bible Continues Series," Jesus' disciples were ready to run away to Galilee, fearing only that they would be captured and put to death. (I think this is a very well-researched and compelling series).

Leaving the disciples in this state of fear, we read in the Scripture today that Mary Magdalene found herself crying at the tomb.

She had no one to tell her that Jesus was in a better place. She had no one to tell her that Jesus had died in peace. There was no one to explain how his body, which had suffered so much on the cross, could be at peace. There was no one to explain that Jesus' death occurred so that the whole of

humanity could be saved. All she might have had in her head were stories about how the religious leaders around her were cursed and died.

She thought she would find the answer if she brought her disciples with her, but they weren't much help. She became sad again. How sad she was; she met the Lord that she loved so much, but she didn't know he was Jesus. She thought Jesus was a garden keeper and asked for his body back.

But she got more than she asked for: she got her first encounter not with Jesus' body but with the risen Jesus.

14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

15 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."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

After Jesus' death, there was violence against him by those in power, curses against him by the religious, and the potential for many additional acts of violence that would follow in his wake. I can only imagine the weight of grief for the disciples, who couldn't afford to grieve the death of their favorite teacher, and for Mary Magdalene, who wanted to at least take care of his body.

But what was it like to encounter the risen Jesus in the midst of all that pain?

The disciple who had been in the midst of the greatest sorrow became the "first" to receive the greatest joy, but the Lord offered her even greater joy. Perhaps she touched Jesus in her desperation. Then Jesus tells her that he must go to the Father, to God. But it's interesting how Jesus said this: Jesus said that God as Father was now not just Jesus' Father and God, but Mary's Father and God also.

17 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.'"

Jesus' expression of "God the Father" is changing from the first person singular to first person plural. Jesus talked about Jesus' God being our God and Jesus' Father being our Father. What does this mean?

In the Book of Genesis, we learned that the God of Abraham was the God of Jacob, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Israel. Now, Jesus provided his God as our God, his Father as our Father. I think

this is the first expression that Jesus used. This expression seems to be unique to the Gospel of John. The words from the Risen Jesus' emphasized that God is no longer just Jesus' God and Father, but our God and Father. Isn't that a beautiful statement?

Mary Magdalene was the first to hear this important story, and she became Jesus' "first apostle" when she was sent to the apostles.

It's a mystery to us that God is not only Jesus' God, but also our God. Jesus' resurrection became the moment that brought God's name back to those who had lost it. He made it possible for us to know that death is no longer the end of life. No longer in the midst of grief like Mary Magdalene, he became the one who comes to us with peace and hope.

Because we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we can comfort those who have lost loved ones.

We can talk about how death is not the end, and we can talk about life after death.

Dear friends, as we celebrate Easter today, does anyone need this news?

Just as Jesus sent Mary, today, he sends you to those who need that peace.

The message of Easter is comforting, especially if you are grieving the loss of a loved one. May this message of resurrection, which proclaims that death is not the end but a new beginning, be filled with comfort for you and especially for all those who have lost loved ones. Let us Pray.

Prayer

Jesus, risen from the dead, the witness of your apostles, is still being witnessed two thousand years later. Thank you for giving us comfort and hope in the here and now. Send us, like Mary, to those who grieve, to those who need your comfort today. Help us to know that you are now not only the God of Jesus, but also our God. In the name of the risen Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Jesus was risen from the dead two thousand years ago. His apostles bore witness to this then and we are bearing witness to this today. Thank you for giving us comfort and hope in the here and now. Send us, like Mary, to those who grieve, to those who need your comfort today. Loving God, help us to know that you are now not only the God of Jesus, but also our God. In the name of the risen Jesus, we pray, Amen.