

March 31, 2013

JOHN'S EASTER STORY
by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

John 20 1-18

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. ²So 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.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then 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; ¹²and 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. ¹³They 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.' ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.' ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus 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." ' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

At the beginning of this Scripture, we see Mary coming to the tomb in which they laid the body of Jesus. It's the first day of the week and it's dark. Mary's story begins in darkness.

So many stories do: the story of the world began in darkness and chaos. Our own stories begin in the darkness of a womb. Episodes of our life's stories occur in the dark – family strife, financial struggles or lost faith. But when there is Hope, the light shines bright - like a glimmer that shows the end of the tunnel or the end of the agony and pain. John's Easter story begins without a glimmer of light.

What could you see in a hundred midnights of darkness? Not much. Shapes. Eerie environmental figures – trees, branches or animals. But the sounds are clear and could be somewhat frightening. But as Mary makes her way to the tomb in this darkness, she can see the shape of the stone that guarded the opening of the tomb, but she can also see the black shape of the opening itself; the stone had been removed.

So now all she can see is her fears, her worst nightmare. Her heart begins to beat exponentially; the flight or fight mode has set in as her adrenaline pumps throughout her body. She runs away from the sight of what certainly must have been a crime – what other explanation could there be? It's dark and being filled with despair Mary may not be seeing things clearly. We need to take a closer look at the evidence. But how many of us have been in a dark place, full of fear and despair and you felt like Mary, the evidence is pointing us to one direction, but your heart is pointing to another.

Being in this heightened adrenaline moment, Mary seeks out someone that could grasp the urgency of the situation. So Mary finds Peter and the other disciple and announces:

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Who is the “they” who, she is certain, removed the body? And more curiously, who is the “we” who do not know where they have laid him (she has been alone, after all)?

We are the “we.”

This is where we see that John is telling us this story in a way that invites us to

enter and be a part of the story. We are there – we are in the hopeless darkness; we do not know where Jesus is.

So we run on that sudden foot race back to the tomb with Peter and the other disciple. Now their paths diverge as they each start seeing things as the dawn is breaking; with the light of a new day we observe different aspect of the crime scene.

First there is other disciple, the race winner. He got to the open tomb first. Hearing this news from Mary, he has the greatest desire to get to the bottom of this dark mystery. He had a lot riding on Jesus, a lot at risk. In John's Easter story, he is always called, "the one whom Jesus loved." So what is at stake for the one whom Jesus loved is the greatest gift of all - LOVE. Love is at stake here. So, of course he ran faster.

Verse 5 "He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in."

This Disciple did not go in. Tombs are impure spaces. You become impure if you enter a tomb. What could make **YOU** bold enough to cross that sacred barrier? And yet, from where he was, outside, he could see the grave clothes inside. He could see enough to know that the not normal had happened. But what did happen? These three witnesses could provide three different explanations.

Some of us are in that state right now. Something has tugged at us enough to get us here to church on Easter Sunday, but we don't consider ourselves "all in." We haven't seen enough of the evidence yet to dispel doubts. Nevertheless, there is something, you cannot put your finger on it, but it is true that there is no corpse in the tomb.

Then Peter arrives. Protecting his well-earned reputation for being impetuous, he breaks the purity code and charges directly and without hesitation into the open tomb. Having committed himself to being all-in, in spite of his doubt and fear, he is in a position to see even more.

"He saw the linen wrappings lying there, the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself."

Jesus' body was truly gone. The evidence points to grave robbing. Grave robbing in the first century was a capital crime. If you were going to do it, you'd best be quick

about it. Grave robbers were undoubtedly un-tidy people. Rolling up the long narrow head wrapping would be like re-winding a soiled gauze bandage that you had just removed from the head of a brutal murder victim. That's not going to happen. Some other explanation had to be available.

Peter saw more, but – what? He leaves. Maybe you are in Peter's shoes. Maybe you have lots of evidence all around you that leads you up to the door of faith – you feel the tug, the wonder of beauty, the call of justice, a sense that we are not alone in a meaningless universe – but is that enough? Apparently not for the beloved Disciple or Peter. The Scripture says

10 *“Then the disciples returned to their homes.”*

So now Mary is alone back at the tomb. Weeping with grief, she, too, now looks into the empty tomb.

Verse 12 says *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.*

Verse 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.”*

She is not prepared to see a resurrected Jesus, so when she “sees” him, she doesn't see that it is him.

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

All of us have been Mary. We have all been face to face with Jesus and didn't know it at the time. God has been there, working in our lives, but not present in our consciousness. It's the old “footprints in the sand” syndrome.

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.”

We have felt so alone, so isolated, so without-hope. But God was there all the time.

But expecting not to see him during these trials and suffering, we did not see him.

Then, the most gracious, merciful, wonderful thing happens. Jesus calls our name:

16 Jesus said to her, “*Mary!*”

She heard Jesus call her name, then she saw him; then she knew!

Here is the question: have you heard Jesus call your name? This is the greatness of the Easter story: not just that resurrection happened, not just that sins are forgiven in some theoretical theological sense. Much more! The Easter story we are invited to enter is one in which we are there, at the open, empty tomb, seeing Jesus, alive, looking into our eyes, and calling us by name!

Can you go that far this morning? You are here on Easter Sunday – so something has brought you this far. Perhaps it is simply tradition or family obligation, but nevertheless, here you are. Perhaps you have been on the outside looking in. You have reasons for wanting to believe and yet you still hesitate. Jesus knows. It’s OK. But there is more.

This morning, picture it. You look into Jesus eyes and he into yours and calls out your name to you, like someone who has been standing at the door waiting for a long lost friend. Are you willing to be named by the risen Christ?

Be named this morning! Hear him calling you. (LOOK TO THE RIGHT SAY THAT PERSON’S NAME; NOW TO THE LEFT)

Go “all in” for Jesus Christ!

But be prepared; to be named personally by the risen Christ is to be changed! To have your eyes opened is to start seeing the whole world differently. Now the sun has come up and it is no longer dark.

The final step happens next. It is a command from the risen Christ who assumes the authority to be Lord. “*go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’*”

“Go.” Go and change the way everything is seen. Go and announce that the risen Christ is no longer limited to one place in one garden, but is now the ascended Christ. Go, now knowing that wherever you go, the risen Christ is present there.

This will change the way you see everything. You will see the world now as you realize Jesus was seeing it.

You will see hungry people and suddenly see a mission field awaiting your compassionate response. You will see suffering people and instead of seeing objects of pity or reasons to look away, you will see opportunities for the glory of God to be revealed in and through your loving involvement. You will see lepers, and now, with your newly opened resurrection eyes, you will not have the impulse to shun them or shame them, but you will embrace them because you will see the risen Christ embracing them.

And you will see yourself, not as you used to; not alone, hopeless and in darkness, but rather in the presence of the one who loves you, who died for you, and who rose alive from the dead, and now calls you by name.

HEAR HIM CALLING! LISTEN! LOOK! RESPOND!