

Rev. Danny Mackey  
St. Mary Magdalene  
July 22, 2018  
John 20:1-2, 10-18  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."*

Today we take a step outside the Trinity season and back into Easter. Today we remember the sainted Mary Magdalene, the first person to behold the risen Lord after His resurrection. This woman has been greatly maligned, slandered, and attacked by so-called scholars and intellectuals of all stripes. On the one hand, she's been put forth variously as the wife of Jesus of Nazareth, the chief apostle of the Early Church, or a victim of the sexism and bigotry of such evil men like Simon Peter. On the other hand, she's been called a prostitute, accused of all manner of past wrongs. Amidst all these various arguments of who and what Mary Magdalene was, one would be tempted to just throw up his or her hands. But in our Gospel lesson this morning, we see Mary Magdalene truly: Mary, the saint who clung to her Risen Lord!

Traditionally, at least in the Western Church, Mary Magdalene has been identified with the unnamed sinner in Luke 7: "And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner...brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind [Jesus] at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment" (Lk 7:37-38).

Some traditions even hold that Mary Magdalene is also Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. You know the one. She sat at her Lord's feet while sister Martha was busy working away in the kitchen. Also, she cried out in frustration at Jesus for not being there to save Lazarus from dying. This Mary of Bethany probably wasn't Mary Magdalene.

In any case, Luke 8 clearly tells us, "And also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities [were with Jesus]: Mary, called Magdalene, for whom seven demons had gone out...who provided for them out of their means" (Lk 8:2-3). We're sure that this Mary—who had been possessed by seven demons and who responded in faith by helping to support Jesus and His apostles—this Mary is the same who was present at Calvary and the first to encounter the Risen Jesus!

Healed by the Lord of seven demons, honored in supporting Jesus during His earthly ministry, witness to the crucifixion, and the first to behold He Who Is Not Dead But Lives on Easter morning—this is Mary Magdalene.

Let us go back to our lesson, which recounts for us those events on Easter morning, which guarantee our salvation. As St. Paul says in Romans 4, “It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rm 4:24-25).

Mary went to the cemetery in the twilight hours of that first Easter Sunday to pay her respects, to render a final act of love to one who had been so brutally taken from her. She came to anoint the corpse of Jesus. No doubt the burial garden was a field of memories for Mary. How could it be anything less? After all, the man whose body was freshly interred in this tomb was the Rabbi who had delivered her from the torment of her demons. He had extended forgiveness of sins to her, treating her as no one had ever treated her before. But now He was gone. She had watched as He was crucified. He was dead and his body was now resting in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. At the least, she could lovingly anoint his body and so demonstrate her love.

Arriving at the grave, Mary sees that the stone set in place over the door of the tomb is gone. Her first thought is grave robbery. She chants a litany of despair and confusion, “The have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they have put Him.” Mary sees the empty tomb and weeps, trapped in her grief.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is not a story from the timeless world of myth. Like the history of Mary Magdalene, like who and what she was, the resurrection has been maligned, slandered, and attacked by the fools of this world. But the resurrection of our Lord Jesus took place in “garden variety history,” real history (Martin Franzmann). There is an empty tomb because the dead Savior who was laid in that tomb on Good Friday evening did not stay dead. God raised Him from the dead.

God raised Jesus from the dead thereby demonstrating that the One crucified is the Son of God. The Lord’s resurrection certifies that everything taught by our Lord is true. His resurrection indicates that the Father accepted the Son’s sacrifice for the sins of the world and in it you are declared righteous. Jesus’ resurrection demonstrates His victory over sin, death, and hell; and it promises that you will rise from the grave and live with your Lord in

the joy of His everlasting kingdom. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives you a sure and certain hope. The resurrection of Jesus declares that “dead and buried” will not be the last words about those who belong to Him by faith.

Mary would come to see that the empty tomb wasn't a cause for crying but for rejoicing. As she stands outside the tomb weeping, two angels appear to her. They ask her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She answers, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” With eyes blinded by her tears, she's unable to recognize that the man standing behind her is Jesus. Jesus repeats the questions of the angels. Mary still thinks that she is talking to a gardener until Jesus calls her by name. Jesus had said that His sheep would hear His voice and follow Him out of death into life. Now Mary, one of the Lord's own sheep, hears the voice of her Good Shepherd and she's led out of her grief into the gladness of Easter, she's brought over from death to life.

Mary hadn't been convinced of the resurrection by the empty tomb but rather by the voice and presence of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ Himself. She hears Him, and she believes. She hears the voice of the One who just days earlier had declared, “I AM the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though He may die, shall live forever. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn 11:25). It's by the hearing His voice that her tears are dried and her life is restored. All that Jesus said and did for her was true. Mary could confess with Job, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (Jb 19:25).

Mary found her Jesus. Or more precisely, Jesus found His Mary. You don't seek Him; He seeks you and finds you. Filled with joy, Mary clings to Him. But Jesus gently frees Himself from her embrace. “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”

There was no need for her to hang on to Jesus any longer. He would never be separated from her again. This was a new day. It was the Day of the Resurrection. This was the first day of a new creation and a new order of things. Death would never again separate them. Not Jesus' death. He had risen never to die again. Not Mary's death. He had died and risen for her. In His ascending to the Father, Jesus would be present for Mary and for all His disciples in a new and greater way. Now He would be present wherever His Word was heard, in the water of His Baptism, in the bread and wine that is His body and blood. Now Mary would embrace Him by faith as He embraced her with His Word of life. Never again would she have to search for the risen body of her Savior.

Nor do you. Where is Jesus that you may cling to Him? Where is He seeking you that you may be found by Him? In His Church, which is His body, in the Word and the Sacrament that make the Church the living body of Christ. The same death-defeating, demon-casting, curse-crushing, crucified-and-risen Jesus that was located for Mary in the garden is located here for you, hidden yet really present, unseen yet heard. He calls to each of you by name from the water of Baptism, embracing you with His death and life. Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 3:3, "For you have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." You are buried in Him and He is buried in you. He buries His crucified body and blood in you, and they work resurrection life in you. "Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the Last Day" (Jn 6:54).

Jesus gave His life for your life. He absorbed your death, your disease, your sin, your sickness, your suffering into His body and He nailed them all to death once and for all on the cross. And then He rose from the dead and now reigns to dispense the gifts of His cross until He appears in glory.

When you celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, you are rejoicing in the resurrection of your own bodies on the Last Day. In rising from the dead, Jesus gives you a preview of the Last Day of the old creation on this, the first day of the new creation. The stone is rolled away. The tomb is empty and ordered. Death has been swallowed up in victory. The disorder and darkness of death has been reordered by the Light of Christ. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Jesus Christ has risen, and in Him, you too will rise in our bodies when He comes in glory.

Like the sainted Mary Magdalene, cling to this Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and reigning. Cling to Him, trusting Him with your life and your death. His wounds are your healing. His death is your freedom. His blood is your forgiveness. His resurrection from the dead is your hope. His words are your life. He is your life and your resurrection. Cling to your Risen Lord, trusting in Him for salvation. "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4).

In Jesus' name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus.