

## It's Personal

Easter! Year B: John 20:1-18  
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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 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, "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.

*On this Easter morning, Jesus meets Mary in the garden. Her losses cause great grief. But in calling her by name, Jesus reveals the reality of the world has changed. It was a personal experience, but Jesus asks her to make it public. Jesus asks the same of us!*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Yes! Yes! Resurrection is what all the fuss is about. We sing the grand hymns and we celebrate Jesus. But just as I was sharing with the children, none of us can arrive to peer in the empty tomb without first remembering what filled it.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early in the morning by herself. It was still dark outside. She didn't come with spices or aloes and myrrh. Jesus' body had already been prepared for burial. But we, you and I, we understand why Mary had to go to the tomb. We've been there ourselves, yes? There is a human need to be near the body or remains of the one we loved.

We think, "I just need to be near him." "I could go and talk to her. Perhaps I'll feel better." We are so used to hearing his voice and having them close. We long to have another conversation.

So we go to the cemetery, wanting to hold onto any last semblance of their life, but the only living thing above ground is the sound of the wind going through branches, and the birds' song; neither of which is comforting. For Mary, seeing the stone rolled away, assumes that someone has taken Jesus' body. This puts her into a tailspin.

Not only is her Lord's body not where it ought to be, but she doesn't know where it is and who might have taken it! Her sobs come in waves, as they do with all of us. Tears obscure sight so she is completely unfazed when angels ask her, "Woman why are you weeping?"

"They've taken away my Lord and I don't know where his body is!"

"They have taken away my Lord." Have you lost anything recently? What has death or the world taken away from you? I've lost my spouse or friend. They took away my job and pension. They have taken away my joy and hope. They've taken away my culture and its value. They've taken away my confidence in the democratic process. They've taken away my car keys and independence. They've taken away our land. The disease has taken her mind away. They have taken...

Death and sin in all its forms has this way of ending dreams and future hopes. Those ideals or plans get thwarted and lost when death comes slithering by. We lose our bearing. The whole world seems unstable and we it's hard to navigate life when we've lost what is most dear to us. Mary's tears aren't hers alone. They are ours, too. We've stood where Mary stands. Her grief is our grief.

But what she doesn't yet know, understand, or believe is that...

Christ is Risen! (**whisper**)  
Christ is Risen, indeed! (**whisper**)  
Wait for it...wait for it..

We can all remember hearing our name called; at school or a graduation. Waiting at the doctors office or over the loudspeaker in an airport. And let's not even get started on how our parents called our names!

I like to think what happened next in the Easter story was more like the young child who had gotten separated from his Dad at the busy store. His legs were short and all the adult legs were so very tall! He only let go of his Dad's hand for a moment. But quickly, the tall people's legs moved him away and he had no idea where he was.

Moments seemed like hours when suddenly he heard, "Frankie! Frankie!" That was all it took. The little guy could distinguish his Dad's voice between all the rest.

"Mary!" "Mary!" She knew that voice! Only one person said it like that. Jesus!

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, alleluia!

"Mary!" This was personal. Jesus came to meet Mary Magdelene in the garden. Not Peter, not John. This was Mary of whom He had cast out seven demons. She had followed Him faithfully and was at the cross during the crucifixion. The Risen Lord came specifically to meet Mary and called her by name. For the Sheperd knows His sheep, He calls them by name.

God knows your name. My name. Will you say your name aloud? Now imagine Jesus calling to you in the garden. Say it again. God knows each of us personally. We may think, 'Why would God care about me?' Or 'I'm not good enough for God.' Or we remember our sin and don't want to let it go. Or we think we have to change before God will have a relationship with us. Not true!

This relationship is about God who loves myself and yourself, right now, just as we are. God knows our fears, our joys, our burdens, our strengths and weaknesses, our hearts, our longings and loves us anyway. God calls you by name. Amanda, Jim, Ginny, Dennis. Hear it. Trust it. Cling to it. Delight in it!

Now say the name of another person or community whom God knows. Maybe they need healing. Perhaps they need hope. Say their name aloud.

Yes, this is personal. Yes, that first Easter was personal for Mary. But it wasn't private. For the incredible news of Jesus being raised from the dead was Good News for the whole world! For heaven's sake, He defeated sin and death! Christ is Risen! **He is Risen indeed, Alleluia.**

Personal, absolutely, but not private. Jesus tells Mary, "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Now the relationship Jesus had with God, The Father, is ours to have as well. It's not just His 'abba' Father, God is our Father too. This was such Good News that it had to go public. It had to go viral. The plan from the beginning was to have millions and millions of followers – just from this account!

Which is why you are here this morning! Someone along the way has told you about Jesus. Some faithful grandparent or Sunday school teacher or TV preacher has told you that God loves you! God forgives you. You've seen a TikTok or YouTube video, you've watched a movie or TV show like, The Chosen. Call out their name. Who was it?

Just as Jesus told Mary to share the news, and someone shared it with us, we are called to share the story of the resurrection with others. And this is such Good News, how can we keep it private? You and I know it changes everything. We agree with that famous Augustine line, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Just imagine if we told one person who is longing to hear God call their name. We know God delights in meeting people right where they are at. And then imagine that same person found more peace. More hope. More joy. So they and go tell another person that God is calling their name. That person found more peace, more hope and more joy. Pretty soon we'd have less anger, more patience. Less competition, more encouragement. Less division, more unity. Less hate and more love. Doesn't that sound like a good Easter story? If God can raise a dead man, God can work this work through us. Let us go and tell.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, alleluia! Let's sing about it. Amen.