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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“MARY, RAISED WITH CHRIST”
John 20:1-18

☩ Friday, when Jesus died, was horrible for Mary Magdalene.

She invested her faith in Jesus. Now, all she had to show for it was a disgraced, disfigured, dead Messiah.

She entrusted her hope with Jesus. It did not survive his flogging, the spikes pounded through his wrists and ankles, and his catastrophic blood loss.

She poured her love into Jesus. She had to wonder: was it the right thing to do? And if she answered yes, a more painful question followed: was it worth it?

☩ On Saturday Mary Magdalene began to see past her personal tragedy to the larger calamity.

→ With Jesus dead, who would {Lk 4:18} **“preach good news to the poor”**? Not the wealthy Sadducees: they had a vested interest in economic inequality.

→ With Jesus dead, who would secure {Lk 4:18} **“freedom for the prisoners”**? Not the legalistic Pharisees: they burdened the people with unnecessary rules. Not the cynical Herodians: they collaborated with Rome in the oppression of Israel.

→ With Jesus dead, who would accomplish {Lk 4:18} **“recovery of sight for the blind”**? Not the suspicious scribes: they accused Jesus of using demonic power to heal people.

→ With Jesus dead, who would {Lk 4:18} **“release the oppressed”**? Not the monastic Essenes: they lived out in the desert to avoid worldly entanglements.

→ With Jesus dead, who would {Lk 4:19} **“proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”**? Not the violent Zealots: they presumed that God had ordained them to execute judgment on the Romans and their Jewish collaborators.

→ With Jesus dead there would be no more {Jn 4:10} **“living water,”** no more {Jn 10:10} **“life... to the full,”** no more {Mt 4:23} **“good news of the kingdom”** for Mary or anyone else. That was Saturday.

☐ Today is Sunday. **“Early on the first day of the week, while it [is] still dark, Mary Magdalene [goes] to the tomb”** (John 20:1a).

“While it [is] still dark.” These 5 short words (actually, only 3 in the ancient Greek) communicate far more than meets the eye.

★ **“While it [is] still dark”** indicates the physical condition under which Mary goes to the tomb. **It is dark out** because the sun (s-u-n) has not yet risen.

★ But **“while it [is] still dark”** also describes Mary’s spiritual condition. As dark as it is outside, it is darker inside her mind and soul, since she does not know, or even dream, that God the Son (S-o-n) has already risen.

→ Mary Magdalene is like those who {Ps 107:10} **“sit in darkness and the deepest gloom,”** a “[prisoner] suffering in iron chains” of shock, regret, loneliness, doubt, fear and dejection. In her eyes {Eldredge} **“the**

whole [world] lies shadowed in brown and gray,” devoid of color and hope.

Mary’s visit to the tomb is an act of devotion, but not of faith. She goes for the same reason we visit a cemetery or erect a handmade roadside cross – to express love, to relive cherished memories, to pray, and to grieve. She is not expecting the LORD to do anything out of the ordinary.

👁️ Mary is blind to the hope of the Gospel.

❑ In John 20:1b, 2 she “[sees] **that the stone [has] been removed from the entrance. So she [comes] running to Simon Peter and**” John **“and [says], ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’”**

Mary sees **“that the stone [has] been removed”** – but her eyes see no sign of resurrection. Instead, she concludes that someone has moved Jesus’ lifeless body.

✧ Keep in mind that Jesus has already proven his mastery of mortality with astonishing miracles. He has temporarily reversed death by raising three corpses to life: {Lk 7:14} a young man in the town of Nain; {Lk 8: 53-54} a 12-year-old girl in Capernaum; and, just a few weeks ago, {Jn 11:25-26} his friend Lazarus in Bethany.

✧ Then there was the Lord’s explicit statement: {Jn 10:17-18} **“I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”**

👁️ Mary is blind to the promises of God.

❑ In John 20:11-13 she stands **“outside the tomb crying. As she weeps, she [bends] over to look into [it] and [sees] two angels in white, seated where Jesus’**

body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They [ask]... ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she [says], ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’”

It is quite early, so very few people are out and about; two strangers dressed all in white are in the tomb; and they are seated exactly **“where Jesus’ body had been.”** Yet Mary does not ask, “Who are you? What are you doing here?” She sees – but does not see – the angels.

Verses 14 and 15: she “[turns] **around and [sees] Jesus standing there, but she [does] not realize that it [is] Jesus. ‘Woman,’ he [says], why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he [is] the gardener, she [says], ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’”**

Everything we know suggests that Jesus looks substantially the same as before. Mary sees the empty tomb, the angels, and the risen Lord’s familiar face – but her eyes see no signs of resurrection.

👁️ Mary is blind to the evidence of God’s resurrection power.

This dear woman {Mk 16:9} has been liberated from demonic possession by Jesus. She has absorbed his teachings and witnessed his miracles. She has broken bread with the Messiah and walked with him on the road. She is one of his most devoted disciples. *How can she see so much, yet see so little?*

■ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said {Mt 6:22-23, TNIV/NLT}: **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If**

your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, how deep is that darkness!”

👁 The eyes of the body are unhealthy when our visual system does not correctly receive or interpret natural light. In the same way, the eyes of the heart are unhealthy when we do not rightly perceive and interpret Jesus, {Jn 8:12} **“the light of the world,”** and the {Jn 1:4, 14} life and glory of God revealed through him.

That is what is going on with Mary Magdalene. The Messiah has revealed God to her, opened her heart to the Gospel and {Ps 103:4} **“[redeemed] [her] life from the pit”**; but today she is stumbling along in the darkness of ignorance and despair. Her spiritual vision is clouded.

It is easy to feel critical of our sister. But *are we so different?*

The Father, Son and H.S. continually reveals himself to me through his written Word, prayer, my spiritual brothers and sisters, his providential direction of my life, and the wonders of Creation. I have heard God’s voice, seen God’s hand, felt God’s presence.

Sometimes my hope in God’s Gospel is unshakable, my trust in his promises unwavering, my confidence in his resurrection power unflinching. But there are days when I begin to despair and doubt and forget who God is and what God has done.

It comforts me to know that a hero of the faith like Mary, who walked and talked with Jesus in the flesh, could be as shortsighted as me. I take even greater comfort in what happens next.

☐ John 20:16-17: **“Jesus [says] to her, ‘Mary.’ She [turns] toward him and cries out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).”** Then he gives her for a mission: **“Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”** Mary becomes the apostle to the apostles. She is the first to bear witness to the resurrection!

■ According to Colossians 3:1, everyone who has been reconciled to God through the ministry of Jesus **“[has] been raised with Christ.”**

Mary is **“raised with Christ”** on Easter Sunday. She goes to the tomb in despair, her faith shattered, her hope destroyed, her love frustrated. Her only purpose is to honor the dead. But she leaves the tomb in joy, her faith renewed, her hope restored, her love refreshed. Now her purpose is to serve the living Lord. She is **“raised with Christ”!**

John’s account of Mary’s experience is not only historical. It is full of Good News for us today.

🌟 First, there is the Good News that the Risen Christ actively seeks us out.

Mary Magdalene was in a quandary. She did not know where to look for Jesus, once she knew that he was not in the tomb. She did not even know who she was looking for, not really. She expected to find a dead body, a corpse, the shell of the man she called Master when, in fact, he was very much alive.

The only reason she ever saw Jesus was because he appeared to her. He sought her out.

That is what Jesus does. He seeks us out even when we do not know where to look for him, or even who we are looking for.

✪ Second, there is the Good News that the Risen Christ opens blind eyes.

My eyes are severely nearsighted. I can I still remember what it was like to wear glasses for the first time. Suddenly, the trees had individual leaves! I could see their outlines, the subtle differences in color, and depth of texture. It came as a surprise – blurriness was normal for me. I did not realize how bad my vision was.

Mary Magdalene was in the same boat. She assumed that she saw exactly what was happening; yet, the eyes of her heart were blind.

Jesus opened her eyes. One word from the risen Messiah and her sight was restored. She realized the truth, and perceived {Jn 1:14} **“the glory of the One and Only.”**

That is what Jesus does. He heals us even when we do not recognize that we are blind.

✪ Third, there is the Good News that the Risen Christ uses us – even us (!) – for his good purposes.

Mary Magdalene was not the obvious candidate to top candidate to announce the Lord’s resurrection. When she went to the tomb her faith was weak, she had failed to understand his teachings, and she was in despair. Once she arrived at the tomb, she was too blind to read the signs that Jesus had conquered the grave.

And yet the Lord blessed Mary by giving her the significant task of giving the first verbal testimony that Christ Jesus was alive.

That is what Jesus does. He uses unsteady, unworthy people like you and me to serve his Kingdom purposes.

May the Risen Christ seek us out!

May the Risen Christ open our blind eyes!

May the Risen Christ use us for his good purposes!

May we be **“raised with Christ”!**