

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: April 23, 2017
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?

That was Friday.

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

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

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

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

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

{Lk 4:19} With Jesus dead, who would **“proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”**? Not the violent Zealots: they presumed that YHWH chose them to judge the Romans and their Jewish collaborators.

{Jn 4:10; 10:10; Mt 4:23} With Jesus dead there was no **“living water,”** no **“life ... to the full,”** no **“good news of the kingdom.”** That was Saturday.

□ Please turn with me to John 20:1-18.

■ Today is Sunday. **“Early on the first day of the week, while it [is] still dark”** (verse 1) **“Mary ... [goes] to the tomb.”**

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

★ **“While it [is] still dark”** indicates the physical conditions 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.

{Ps 107:10; Eldredge} Mary Magdalene is like those who **“sit in darkness and the deepest gloom,”** a “[prisoner] **suffering in ... chains”** of shock, regret, doubt, fear, and dejection. In her eyes **“the whole [world] lies shadowed in brown and gray,”** devoid of color and hope.

Mary goes to tomb for the same reason we visit a cemetery – to bury someone, to grieve, to express love to someone who cannot return it. She is not expecting the Almighty to do anything out of the ordinary.

👁️ Mary is blind to the hope of the Gospel.

■ Verses 1-2. Mary arrives at the tomb and 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 to her eyes it is not a sign of resurrection. Instead, she concludes that someone has moved Jesus’ lifeless body.

{Lk 7:14; 8:53-54; Jn 11:25-26} Keep in mind that Messiah has already proven his mastery over mortality. He has reversed death by raising three corpses: a young man from Nain; a 12-year-old girl in Capernaum; and, no more than two weeks ago, his friend Lazarus in Bethany.

{Jn 10:17-18} Then there was the Lord’s explicit statement: “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 verses 11-13 she stands **“outside the tomb crying. As she weeps, she [bends] over to look [in] and [sees] two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body [has] been, one at the head ... the other at the foot. They [ask] ... ‘... why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken**

my Lord away,’ she [says], ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’”

Two strangers dressed all in white are in the tomb, seated **“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 14-15: 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.’”**

Mary looks into the empty tomb. She sees the angels, and the face of her Risen Lord – but she sees no sign of resurrection.

👁️ Mary is blind to God’s resurrection power.

? {Mk 16:9} This dear woman 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 followers.

How can she see so much, yet see so little?

{Mt 6:22-23, TNIV/NLT} In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: **“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!”**

👁️ {Jn 8:12} 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 soul are unhealthy when we do not rightly perceive Jesus, **“the light of the world,”** and the life and glory of God revealed through him.

{Ps 103:4} That is what’s going on with Mary. Over the last few years Messiah has revealed God to her, opened her heart to the Gospel and redeemed her **“life from the pit”**; but today, she is stumbling along in the darkness of ignorance and despair.

❓ It is easy to assume a posture of judgment with our sister. But are we so different?

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reveals himself to me in Scripture, prayer, providential events, the Created world, and my spiritual family. Figuratively speaking I have heard God’s voice, seen God’s hand, felt God’s presence.

Sometimes, my hope in Christ’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, to distrust, and to forget who the Lord is and what he has done.

It is a comfort 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. But I take greater comfort in what happens next.

■ Verses 16-17: **“Jesus [says] to her, ‘Mary,’ She [turns] toward him and cries out ... ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).”** Then he gives her 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!

{Col 3:1} Mary Magdalene is **“raised with Christ”** on Easter Day. When she goes to the tomb her faith is shattered, her hope is crushed, her love is 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”!**

Mary’s experience is full of Gospel for us.

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

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

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

That is what Jesus does. He seeks us out when we don’t know where he is, or even who he is.

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

I remember wearing glasses for the first time. The drive home from the eye doctor’s office was a revelation. Suddenly, the trees had individual leaves! I

could perceive their outlines, the differences in color, and depth of texture. It came as a shock. I had no clue how bad my vision was.

Mary was in the same boat. She assumed she saw clearly; yet the eyes of her heart were blind.

The Savior opened her eyes. One word from the risen Messiah and her sight was restored.

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 commissions us (!) for his good purposes.

Mary was not an obvious candidate to witness for the Lord. She did not understand his teachings all that well. Her faith had crumbled. She failed to read the signs of the resurrection.

Not to mention, she was female. In first century Judaism, a woman was not eligible to testify in a court of law. Her words carried no weight. Society judged her witness to have no value.

Yet the Savior assigned her the significant task of delivering the first testimony that he was alive!

That is what Jesus does. He chooses unsteady, unworthy people like you and me to serve him and embody his kingdom.

May we be **“raised with Christ”!**

John 20:1-18 is the word of the Lord.