# Something More for Easter

## Easter, Year C – John 20:1-18

*preached at Saint Mark’s Pro-Cathedral, Hastings, March 27, 2005*

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul’s, Henderson, March 27, 2016*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

“Christ is risen. Alleluia!” And your line: “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!” Brothers and sisters, we come together this Easter Day to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. We know that this is a happy day, a day to put on our best clothes, a day to plan a wonderful meal, a day to come to church with the whole family and sing glad hymns and shout “alleluia!”.

But as we listen again to the story *behind* this morning’s celebration, it’s important to remember that the people we encounter at the tomb in today’s Gospel didn’t know any of that. While the other accounts talk about more women being at the tomb that day, according to John’s Gospel, none of that happened before Mary Magdalene trudged down that dark road *alone*. She wasn’t having springtime thoughts about flowers coming from the cold, dead earth. She wasn’t thinking of caterpillars turning into beautiful butterflies. Thoughts of eggshells cracking open for baby chicks, or of prolific little bunnies as signs of new life, did not enter her mind. That’s because she was still in the *middle* of the story that we know so well.

It was dark when Mary arrived at the tomb. She hadn’t come to make joyous resurrection acclamations – Alleluia! She hadn’t come to sing glad Easter hymns. She hadn’t even come to check and see if Jesus’ body was still there. Mary came to the tomb in the cold pre-dawn for only one reason: she came to grieve.

In just a few short days, Mary’s whole world had come crashing down around her head. She had centered all her hope and her trust and her love in this Jesus of Nazareth. She had built, or rather, *re*-built her life around this one man, his teaching *and* his example. Perhaps confusing her with other characters in the Gospel story, perhaps keep a woman from being too great a part of the story, perhaps to do nothing but make a rhetorical sermon illustration, much later, some would famously paint Mary with labels that simply aren’t part of the biblical witness. But from the Gospels we *do* know that Jesus had healed Mary. Jesus had touched Mary’s life, *and* Mary’s heart. Jesus had done for Mary what no one else would do, what no one else *could* do, and her life had been changed forever by his presence in her life, changed forever by his love for her. And so, Mary had been among the first to follow Jesus. Mary had traveled among his disciples throughout his ministry in Galilee, and on to its climax in Jerusalem. Mary had seen her friend preach peace to the troubled, and lift up the poor and the oppressed, and forgive greater sinners than herself. Mary had seen her teacher give sight to the blind, make the deaf to hear, and send the lame dancing away in thanksgiving. Mary had even seen her Lord restore life to the dead.

But now, but *now* she had seen her friend dragged from his prayers in the garden. Now she had seen her teacher summarily tried for treason and blasphemy. Now she had seen her Lord stripped and beaten and mocked. Now Mary had seen her *everything* nailed to a cross, and pierced in the side, and laid in his grave. And now Mary was alone… *again*.

And so, before it was even light enough for her to actually see the path through the garden burial ground where they had laid him, Mary came to the tomb. Maybe she would wait no longer for the long Passover Sabbath to be over. Maybe the horrors of these three days would not let sleep come anyway. *Maybe* she knew the way in the dark because she had come *many* times in the last horrible hours.

And so she found her way to the tomb. Mary fully expected to find things as she had last left them. Mary fully expected to find everything in its tragic, proper place. Mary fully expected that that great stone still sealed the ruins of her hopes and dreams in the cold, dark pit of a grave. But when she arrived at the tomb, Mary found that the stone was gone!

*Running* to find his friends, Mary found Peter and that other disciple. She said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Maybe she expected some sort of an explanation from these two that had been so close to Jesus. Maybe she expected some sort of *consolation* from them. *Surely* she expected more than she got from them. In their own excitement and amazement, and perhaps even *anger*, Peter and John ran back to the tomb with her. They ducked into the empty tomb. They saw the abandoned linens and wrappings. They apparently had some notion about what had gone on. And then, at least in John’s Gospel, they went home. *They went home*, leaving Mary dazed and confused and weeping, there outside that *impossibly* empty tomb.

As far as she was concerned, nothing had changed. As far as she was concerned, someone had *still* taken away the body. As far as she was concerned, she still didn’t know what had become of her friend, her teacher, her Lord. Her hopes were still in shreds. Her heart was *still* broken. Even in the face of the disciple’s apparent belief in yet another miracle, even in the face of their apparent lack of concern, Mary wept. Even confronted by angels, Mary wept. Even turning to face Jesus himself, filled to overflowing with her grief, Mary wept.

Until, that is, Jesus spoke her name. Then the whole weight of the grief Mary had brought to the tomb that dark morning was lifted, and she was freed to recognize her friend, she was freed to recognize her teacher for who he was, she was free to recognize her Lord for who he was *to her*. And as she returned again to find the disciples, there were no tears. Mary’s message when she left the tomb that morning was a simple one. As she found the others that had followed the anointed one through his life, she knew she had at last been set free. As she continued as a witness to the Resurrection, as the *first* witness to the Resurrection, all Mary had to say was, “I have *seen* the Lord.”

And so, here we are, two thousand years later. We come to church today to celebrate the Resurrection. We’re all dressed up in our Easter finery (and you do look marvelous!). We’re singing those glad old hymns (and perhaps some that are new to some). We’re shouting the Alleluias (in particularly fine voice). We’re just about ready for the wonderful feast that Connie and others have laid out for us, and for a day reveling in the company of beloved family and friends… if the preacher would just hurry things along a bit.

But let’s not leave the empty tomb too soon, shall we. Because in addition to the colorful clothes and the smiling faces and the residue of chocolate bunnies, some of us have brought our *own* burden to the tomb this morning as well. Maybe our load of grief, like Mary’s is the loss of loved ones. Maybe our weight is the frustrations and disappointments we have suffered in our lives, the pain inflicted on us by careless others. Maybe our cross is the weight of our own sins, the bad choices we have made in our lives.This morning, two thousand years *this* side of the story, we know why we’re here. We know from the telling and the retelling of the story of our Lord’s Resurrection by preachers and by teachers and by our mothers and our fathers that this is the day to celebrate that Christ *is* risen. We know for a certain fact that we have cause for great joy this Easter Day. But friends, we aren’t really healed, we aren’t really set free, we aren’t really made whole by the glorious Resurrection of our friend, our teacher, our Lord, until we lay down whatever burden *we* have brought with us to the empty tomb of our *own* resurrection in Christ, until we are enlivened and empowered by the saving grace of him who lived for us and died for us – and rose again for us, until we are ready to go out these doors and exclaim with Mary, to our friends and to our community and to our *world*, that *we* have *seen* the Lord.”

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*