

Sermon – April 9, 2023 Easter Sunrise Service
“They came to look at the tomb.”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: John 20:1-18

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words, making them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Like Mary Magdalene came to a beautiful garden, we have come early to this beautiful place on the water. She came early, while it was still dark, to the tomb. And so, we have gathered here at sunrise to help us recall the events of that early morning some 2000 plus years ago. In the darkness, Mary is able to see that the stone has been removed from the tomb. In her mind this means Jesus' body has been taken away and the work of love she has come to complete cannot be accomplished until she can find Jesus' body. In response to her discovery of the open tomb, Mary runs back to where she knows the disciples are staying to share this news with them, telling Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." This is the first message that Mary Magdalene carries to the disciples early on this, the first day of the week.

Peter and John's response to Mary's news is to run to the tomb to see for themselves what has happened with Jesus' body. They run to investigate her news for themselves. John arrives first and by this point, there is enough light for him to look into the tomb and see the burial cloths of Jesus. John does not go into the tomb but waits outside. Peter arrives shortly and does not stop to look into the tomb but goes right in to investigate. What Peter finds in the tomb is not

Jesus's body but the burial cloths lying on the bench with the face cloth that had once been on Jesus' head now folded up by itself. What Peter sees is not a crime scene where those who rolled away the stone hurriedly removed the linen cloths that wrapped Jesus' body. What Peter finds is an orderly scene of grave cloths with the face cloth carefully folded up by itself. John enters the tomb, and he sees and believes. He does not yet believe that Jesus is risen. We know this as the writer tells us that these men do not yet understand the scriptures about Jesus' resurrection. John, at this point, may believe that Jesus has gone to the Father as Jesus had told his disciples he would. Peter and John leave the empty tomb, but Mary Magdalene remains to weep.

Finally, in the midst of her weeping, Mary Magdalene looks into the tomb and sees two angels! The angels ask her why she is weeping, and Mary tells them. We should realize that she is speaking with angels without their telling her, "Do not be afraid." It is as if the fear of the divine that so often accompanies the arrival of messengers from God is no longer present. Mary tells the angels she is seeking Jesus' body. She does not yet grasp what has happened, why the tomb is empty, or even why angels are present and speaking to her. Her focus remains to find Jesus' lifeless body and care for it. And then Mary turns. She is still seeking Jesus' body, but the idea described as her turning from the empty tomb and angels to someone begins to emerge. It is as if she is beginning to turn from the empty tomb and her search for Jesus' body to something new. Her turning seems to bring a new place to seek Jesus' body. Someone else has arrived who might know where Jesus' body has been placed. She is asked for the second time why she is weeping. She is still weeping and searching for Jesus' body, thinking that maybe this new voice belongs to a gardener who has cleared the tomb of Jesus' body and placed it elsewhere. Mary pleads to be able to care for Jesus' dead body. Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knows our names, calls Mary by name, loudly, as if calling her from some faraway focus to wake up to the voice and command of the Good Shepherd. At the sound of her name, she awakes from her search for Jesus' body and sees Jesus. She sees the risen Lord and speaks the name she has used for Jesus in the past, "Rabboni!" or teacher. Don't miss that the first person to see the risen Lord is Mary Magdalene. But seeing the risen Jesus is not a time for her or us to cling to him and renew a broken past relationship. Jesus has not come to Mary to pick up the relationship of teacher to a disciple. Nor is it a time to hold to Jesus. It is a time to be sent by Jesus and to go and share Good News. Jesus gives Mary a message to take to his brothers, telling her, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary does not need to care for Jesus' body

that was laid in the tomb. There is no body in the tomb and there is no need for weeping; instead, Mary is to go and begin to care for the body of Christ that is currently hiding in Jerusalem and to call them to go forth to all of the world to share the Good News she has received. We should notice that Jesus does not send Mary to his disciples, but to his brothers. When Jesus sends Mary to his brothers, Jesus speaks of a new relationship between himself and his followers by calling them brothers. And then Jesus tells Mary he is going to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God. With these words, Jesus tells Mary that her relationship with him, the disciples' relationship with him, and the relationship that all who believe in Jesus have with him, and all who will come to believe in him will have, will be new. We are reconciled through Jesus to his Father, our Father, to his God, our God. Jesus does not send Mary to go and tell his brothers that Jesus is back and ready to pick up the relationship he had with them before the cross. Jesus sends Mary to share the Good News that they and we are now reconciled to God, that those who believe in Jesus have been adopted into the relationship Jesus has with his Father, our Father. The price has been paid on the cross and Jesus' resurrected body literally and physically speaks to this new relationship. Mary does not cling to Jesus, but goes and tells his brothers, "I have seen the Lord," and tells them the Good News about our Father and our God.

We have gathered here this morning to remember that through the cross Jesus died that we might live. We have gathered to recall that we are now Jesus' brothers and sisters. We have gathered to witness the rising of the sun and recall that early on the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead, and that we who believe in Jesus have been reconciled to God through Christ. We, like Mary Magdalene, are to go and share this great Good News. We are to go and tell others that we also "have seen the Lord" and that if we will believe in Jesus, we too now have his Father as our Father and his God and our God.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Pray with me: Jesus help us to see you this morning as Mary did on that first Easter Sunday. Lord, help us to hear your voice sending us out into the world to your brothers and sisters and give us courage to go and tell all we meet that we have seen the Lord. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen