

**+ John 20:1-18 + I Have Seen the Lord! +
+ The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Dawn + 8 April 2012 +**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The Sabbath was over and the night sky was starting to brighten in the east, but that didn't matter to Mary Magdalene and the other women who had followed Jesus. In the chill spring air, the women shivered as they prepared their packs of spices for the burial of their Teacher, Jesus.

It was the first day of the week—Sunday. The women were still in shock from the events of the past week, and none more than Mary Magdalene. They couldn't fully comprehend what they had seen. Just a week before Jesus had entered Jerusalem triumphantly and now he was dead. Oh, what he had endured! Betrayal followed by beatings and abuse beyond description. Early Friday morning, the Jews handed Jesus over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate to be executed, to be crucified.

The women had watched from a safe distance as Jesus stumbled his way beneath the cross to the hill called Golgotha outside the city gates. They watched the mobs hurl insults at their beloved Teacher, and they saw a strange darkness settle over the land for several hours during the middle of that day. It was like the darkness that covered their hearts.

With his dying breath, Jesus cried out, ***"It is finished...Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit."*** (John 19:30; Luke 23:46) He bowed his head and died. Suddenly an earthquake shook the area violently, but Jesus was dead and the darkness of grief, worry, and dread was setting in. Later from a distance, they watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus claim Jesus' body from the Romans and hurry to prepare him for burial before the Passover Sabbath began. The men then placed Jesus' body in Joseph's newly cut tomb and rolled a large stone in front of the entrance.

The Passover Sabbath was now over. The first rays of dawn started to break through the clouds as Mary Magdalene and the other women trudged to the tomb. What would they do about the heavy stone in front of the opening or the Roman guards they had heard about? Such questions only made their hearts heavier because all they could see was grief and sorrow.

When they neared the tomb, they couldn't believe what they saw. No Roman guards, no heavy stone blocking the tomb entrance, and...no Jesus? What happened? Who could have done this? Where was Jesus' body? Mary rushed to the tomb ahead of the other women and quickly realized it was empty. It was like pouring salt into her emotional wounds. She was so filled with grief that she immediately ran back into town to tell the disciples the awful news leaving the other women behind.

Mary went right to Simon Peter and John, and her message was heartbreaking. With a faltering voice, she reported, ***"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him."*** Peter and John hurried to see what happened for themselves, but Mary's tears of grief only flowed anew as she started back to the tomb herself.

Though filled with grief and sorrow, there were other things on the minds of Peter and John. Peter probably took Jesus' death harder than anyone else. Not only did he have to deal with the grief of losing his beloved Teacher, but a heavy yoke of guilt was crushing him. He had abandoned his Lord in his hour of need. He had buckled under the pressure of a servant girl's interrogation and denied knowing the One who knew him so well. Imagine the knife in Peter's heart when he heard the rooster crow and caught Jesus' disappointed glance. Peter hadn't slept since that moment. His shame was too great, so he ran to see what had happened.

What about John? He too was filled with grief and sorrow, but also guilt and shame. Like the others, he fell asleep while Jesus prayed in agony. He deserted Jesus in the garden. He could try to soothe his conscience knowing he had been in Jesus' vicinity in the high priest's court and had consoled Jesus' mother at the cross, but there was something else. None of the disciples believed the first reports about Jesus' resurrection, including John. So he, too, ran to see the tomb for himself.

John got there first and peered into the tomb. A moment later Peter barreled right past him and entered the tomb first. ***"He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen."*** This was no grave robbery. The burial cloths were neatly folded and left where Jesus had been. When John stepped inside, we're told, ***"He saw and believed."***

Mary Magdalene reached the tomb as they left. She stood outside the tomb flooding the ground with her bitter tears. Finally she peered inside the tomb and **“saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.”** She was so grief-stricken that she wasn’t shocked at all. They asked her, **“Woman, why are you crying?”** She answered them as if they were normal people visiting the cemetery. **“They have taken my Lord away...and I don’t know where they have put him.”** She still couldn’t see what her Lord had done. She still couldn’t see even with two angels from heaven appearing before her.

At that moment, she turned around...and there standing before her was Jesus, yet she didn’t recognize him. In fact, we’re told she thought he was the gardener, the groundskeeper. Jesus asked her, **“Woman...why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** With grief she turned away as a plan started coming together in her mind. **“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”** You can almost see Jesus smile and say, **“Mary.”** Immediately she knew it was him and she cried out in her native Aramaic, **“Rabboni!”** (My Teacher!)

She threw herself at his feet and clung to him with every fiber of her being. She wasn’t going to let him go this time! He’s alive—really, truly alive! Yet Jesus told Mary, **“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”** What else could Mary do than run back to Jerusalem again? Mary’s bitter tears of grief became sweet tears of joy. The darkness of sorrow that had covered her eyes disappeared with the light of life. **“I have seen the Lord!”**

Is that who you expected to see when you came to church this morning? I hope so. It’s wonderful to see again dear brothers and sisters in Christ and a church beautifully dressed in Easter glory, but it’s so much more important for us to see the Lord today—the living, risen, exalted Lord.

You and I need to see him today because most other days we’re like Mary or Peter or John. You see grief. You see sorrow. You see loss. You see things go from bad to worse. You see dreams destroyed and hopes dashed. You see darkness settle over others or over yourself—the darkness of sorrow, the darkness of fear, the darkness of dread, and the darkness of death.

You see what seems like the constant victory march of sin and Satan and death in this sinful world. You see them victorious in your own life. You see guilt in every aspect of your life. You see shame for what you’ve done or failed to do. You see doubt or skepticism creeping into your own heart.

What you see day in and day out is so heartbreaking that it leaves you unable to see Jesus. At times in our lives, it almost seems to us like Jesus is still in his grave or that someone stole his body and we don’t know where he is. So how will we see Jesus?

How did Mary see Jesus? He spoke to her. She first saw him through his Word. That’s how you see Jesus too! In that Word, you see Jesus, who dries your tears with the comfort of his resurrection. You see Jesus, who endured the worst this world could throw at him to overcome the world for you. You see Jesus, who restores your hope with the reality that he most certainly defeated Satan and his forces of darkness. He rose again to guarantee that your every sin is forgiven. You see Jesus, who scatters your darkness with the light of life that will not be put out. You see Jesus, who truly rose from the dead and lives and rules eternally for you. Through the Word, you see Jesus.

When you look at the font and in the water and Word of Holy Baptism, there you see Jesus too. When you look at the bread and wine of the Holy Supper, there again you see Jesus truly **“given...and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins”** as he gives you himself (Matthew 26:26-28). Like Mary and later Peter and John, in the Word and sacraments, you see that Jesus is very much alive.

Someday you’ll see him in the flesh with your own eyes too. You’ll see him glorious and exalted and truly living when you are in the glories of heaven. You can be sure that because Jesus lives, you will live too. That’s the best news of all. Mary ran with it to share it. That’s what you and I can do too. When you leave today, run to the people you know and love and tell them, **“I have seen the Lord!”** He lives and will never die again, and because he lives you will too! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.