

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Holy and most Gracious God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight. Our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

We might all remember seeing “The Greatest Story Ever Told” or one of the other great bible epics and remembered from somewhere deep in our recollections that there was thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and the soldiers fell, and with great and unmistakable power, the LORD causes the stone to roll away and the soldiers to fall and proudly proclaim on Easter morning...what do we say on Easter...oh, c’mon we can do better than that...that’s right. He’s Risen. He has risen indeed.

But that story of loud crashing and smashing is in the Gospel of Matthew. Today we are in the Gospel of John. In John, as we read, the morning is quiet. The sky is dark. That should not be lost on us. When we read about light in the Gospel of John, it is an indication of heaven up above, knowledge of God, living in Love and Life of the Kingdom and all that entails. Darkness in John is about things down below, emptiness, the antithesis of light.

Maybe it's around 4 a.m.; the stone has been moved. Have you ever come home from a vacation late at night, in a dark house, and maybe something outside is not quite in the right place? I remember early in my first marriage when I walked up to the front door and saw that it was slightly ajar. And the frame was a mass of splinters. So what did I do? Naturally, in the pre-cell phone era I didn't go to the apartment management or drive down the block to a phone booth. I did the dumb thing, when seeing a potential crime scene; I went in.

Mary did the smarter thing. She ran for help, although there were others there that are unnamed in the Gospel, because in verse 3 it reports she states, "WE don't know where they have put him". They were coming to anoint the body and prepare it for burial, because that could not have happened on Saturday, the Sabbath. And the tomb was open, the ancient equivalent of seeing the door frame smashed.

So Mary ran to tell Simon Peter and John, the beloved disciple, and Peter seems to get winded a little as John outruns him to the tomb, and sees the linens. Peter goes

in, looks around, and the Bible doesn't comment what happens other than he goes home.

Peter reminds me of the cop who showed up at the site of my apartment burglary, looks around, dutifully fills out the police report, and goes home, shrugging his shoulders, not all that helpful with what to do next.

John reacts differently; the Bible reports, "John believes." But he doesn't tell Peter about this; and he doesn't seem to tell Mary. Mary stays, still in sadness. Weeping. Dazed. Confused. She still thinks that maybe someone had taken the body elsewhere when it was she, who loved Jesus, had come to show a last act of love to anoint and prepare the body for burial.

She again goes and looks in the tomb. There are two angels, one on either side of where Christ had been. Where else do we see two people on either side of Christ in those last days? The Last Supper, yes, and maybe Mary is one of those people if you're a DaVinci code fan, so the appearance of the angel is a reflection of her own faith, love, and revelation about to occur. Or maybe it was on the Cross, where Christ was surrounded by two thieves on either side, and the saving power of Christ in removing Sin

is bound up in these two angels who are now on either side of where Christ, where faith, might take Jesus' physical place in the tomb. Sin is overcome, death of Christ does not have the last word, and those who had no hope are raised in new life. The thieves, forgiven of their sin, appear once more. As angels.

The angels are messengers of life, and they ask Mary about her tears. And Mary cannot face them to answer, but instead turns, and in her grief she does not recognize the person before her.

She is in mourning, in grief, she is weeping, she cannot yet believe. We've all been there. When we are in mourning, in weeping, in those terrible, dark times in our lives, it is sooooo hard to see, hear or feel any hope. Mary doesn't react that the angels are angels. It doesn't register for her that she is witnessing a glimpse of God and the Kingdom.

Just as when we have those emotional moments of anger, sadness, grief, those emotions which if left unchecked will guide us to the "down below" places of our soul we cannot see possibilities of God. When glimpses of God are coming to us, right in front of us, we cannot see

the grace that abounds in our grief, in our sadness, in our anger, in our confusion. Those around us try, desperately, to assuage us and get us to see the light, because they are not in the grip of the darkness. From our vantage point, inside grief, inside Mary, we are blocked.

Aside from Christ on the Cross, this is the most desperate time in the Gospel for Mary and for many of us. We have forgotten that John believed just a few verses before. After all, he didn't exactly tell anyone, he just went home. And he didn't try to explain this to Mary apparently; the Bible doesn't tell us that one way or the other, but she's still wallowing inconsolably in grief.

And this next part is the Easter message. Christ says to her, "WHO is it that you're seeking"? Not What. Who.

Again, Mary is blocked, and not hearing this for what it is, assumes that this guy is involved with moving the body somehow. And then Christ speaks her name. "Mary." Because Christ is the good shepherd. And what do sheep and shepherds know about each other? Sheep know the sound of the shepherd's voice. "Mary."

And then the Bible says something really, really curious. It doesn't say that she answered Jesus. It says that 'she turned toward him.'

She turned toward him.

She turned away from everything that she had ever known to that point. Her tears of grief were suddenly gone. She turned away to something new. But not until she TURNED TOWARD HIM, changing direction from grief to joy, from death to life, darkness to light, sin to truth. She left the old behind, and she believed.

How do we know that? What does she call the risen Christ? "Rabbouni". Teacher.

What did the disciples call Jesus early in the Gospel? Teacher. When their faith was just beginning, when they were unsure, when they were listening, learning, watching, and they didn't quite get it.

"Rabbouni". Teacher. Jesus. JESUS, you're here. Jesus it's YOU. But she doesn't quite complete the journey for she tries to hold onto him in the old way, give the risen Christ a great big joyful old bear hug, and we can hear her jumping up and down throwing her arms up and saying,

“my GOD, my GOD, you have not forsaken me” and ready to embrace him as she always had as one of the chose circle of friends. But Christ is not available anymore to her in that way.

Jesus is not available to any of us anymore in that way. There is now Christ, not the human Jesus, and Christ is bigger than that, Christ is available to the whole world, accessible to every one of us; but not in the old way. In a fundamentally different way. A better way. Christ is returning to ‘My God and Your God’ he says. And Mary is tasked to tell the others.

We are not tasked or asked to hold onto this world. We are asked to imagine a different world. Still in this world, but not of this world. Ours is not a world of what is, but who we are, what we will be.

That only became clear to me in my experience of the burgled apartment after the police had left. The dog had hidden under the bed the whole time. Shotgun shells had been strewn over the comforter in random fashion, and the 12-guage left with a stock splintered into pieces and the trigger mechanism useless. Had I been rooted to this world, I might have repaired the door and bought a bigger

gun, maybe a couple, sure that if they came back, I'd be ready. Guarding the possessions that were MINE, to the death, if it came to that.

But I thought differently. I was glad to have the love of the few family momentos they didn't take, a few photo albums that could not be sold for drugs, and the love of the little family I had at the time. It was not about this world and the lost Sterling, Crystal, or many baubles and bangles and beads. My thoughts were about love of who I sought, not what. It was about living differently. With an insurance policy, this time, for sure, for I didn't know about renters insurance at age 22. Never made THAT mistake again. And yes, I moved. Burglars would be back, with guns of their own.

And for my part, I discerned that my little apartment showed little resemblance to the OK Corral and I was not asked by the law or the Lord to try to make it such.

But living differently meant putting one's heart in the faith of the connectedness of community. Of the people we love. Of the memories we share. For as the Apostle Paul says, the Holy Spirit is active wherever we live in Love with one another, the great commandment of Christ in



this Gospel of John. Love one another as Christ has loved us.

Not with great fanfare and noise. In the quiet, reflected spaces of one-to-one relationships. For in those moments, where we ask, “Who do you seek”, therein will we find the Easter for our searching souls.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts this Easter.

Mary sought to make sense of the Cross. She went to seek connection and meaning to the one she loved. Mary apprehends the miracle of Easter, not the disciples; the one who came to show love to Jesus even in death is the first to receive new life of the Resurrection. An ordinary woman, showing love, discovers Christ first. In her heart, she turned TOWARD Jesus and her eyes saw anew her life.

In our ordinariness, we know how to love. We know what to do. We can see Christ all around us, if we live a little differently. With the Who, not the What, of our lives. And in that calling to new, different life, Easter is with us, freeing us to live the lives that we are called to share. Lives of Love. Blessed be the resurrection. Thanks be to God, Amen.