

“Mary’s Testimony”

John 20:1-18

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Mary Magdalene is one of those colorful characters we meet in Scripture. Over the last two thousand years, all kinds of fictional legends have been told about her. Novels have been written to embellish her story. Some consider her a prostitute. Some imagine her having been the wife of Jesus. What matters to John, the Gospel writer, is that she is a reliable witness to the Resurrection. John sees that Mary Magdalene’s life is one of those that has been transformed through her association with Jesus. She is filled with gratitude. She is one of those who experienced the abundance of life God intends. In the presence of Jesus, she felt forgiven and valued and sacred.

Mary Magdalene is among that inner circle of believers who stayed with Jesus to the bitter end. The Gospel writer chooses to place on her lips the persuasive testimony that changes everything forever. She reports to the disciples: I HAVE SEEN THE LORD! Her testimony is brief, to the point, and has an undeniable ring of truth to it. Christ is no longer in the grave; no longer held by death’s darkness, but is alive and risen and present. This is Mary’s testimony.

In our Confirmation class, we have just completed an exercise known as Life Maps. A Life Map is a collage of four or five pictures depicting times or events after which we saw the world differently. We often find that it is in these turning points, negative or positive, that we have our most meaningful encounters with God.

If Mary Magdalene were presenting her Life Map, there would be a few pictures of her hanging out with Jesus and the disciples, but right in the center of the collage would be a larger illustration of her encountering the Risen Christ in the garden outside the tomb. Witnessing the Resurrection changed everything forever.

We don't have Mary Magdalene's journal or her personal diary, but we do know what the Resurrection meant to her and to those first believers and to all who have believed over all the years.

The Resurrection; what does it mean?

First, it means that with God anything is possible. Any desperate situation can be transformed. There is a light for any darkness. Any addiction can be conquered. Any fear can be erased. Any wound can be addressed. Any hopeless situation can be made hopeful.

Easter makes all the difference. Easter is why I end every sermon with the words, "In the greatest of hope." It is why these same words, "In the greatest of hope," appear on my stationery. Hope is born on Easter morning. What Mary Magdalene witnesses is the sure reality of hope. Hope is not wishful thinking. It is not a letter to Santa Claus. It is not pie in the sky. Hope is a knowing that with Christ's Resurrection comes the assurance that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. Absolutamente nada!

Second, the Resurrection means that death is not the end. Easter announces the simple truth: **life is eternal**. Your life is eternal. My life is eternal. We are Easter people. I don't know exactly what form our lives will take after we have died. My belief is that we will all receive spiritual bodies that don't have any of the restrictions of our current bodies, and that our lives will continue to be in relationship with our God and with all of our loved ones. That may sound naïve or hokey, but I happen to believe it.

In my imagination, when I die, I'll be picking blueberries with Grampa Clemmer, kicking a soccer ball around with my brother Bob, singing the old hymns with my sister, Debbie, and enjoying warm hospitality at my mother's table. There will be no end to it.

I believe Mary Magdalene's testimony. In seeing the Risen Lord, she saw that our lives transcend time and space and culture. She saw that whether we believe or not, life is a gift that God intends forever.

Third, Resurrection means we have work to do! For Mary Magdalene and the other disciples, Resurrection was a call to action, a call to start loving as Christ loved; a call to start forgiving as Christ forgave; a call to minister unto the poor as Christ ministered. As Mary Magdalene and the disciples reflected together on their three years with Jesus, they no doubt recalled how he had washed their feet, how he had dared to touch a leper, how he had affirmed children, how he had made it possible for the estranged to find their way back into the community.

As they recalled the teachings of Jesus, they no doubt remembered his words about praying for the enemy, welcoming the stranger, not returning evil for evil, ministering unto the least of God's children.

All these flashbacks flooded their minds and hearts. For them, the Resurrection was a call to action, a call to be Christ's body in the world, to be his hands and his feet and his arms.

For me, and I hope for you, the Resurrection is a summons to discipleship, a call to be a Christ presence in our world, a light in the persistent dark places. I'm glad we have the Yale Brass with us this morning! We need the brass! The trumpet sound!

The Brass helps us to know the Resurrection is a call to arms, NOT the arms we associate with wars, but the arms we associate with embracing the neighbor.

I am one of those Bible readers who believes Mary's testimony! Surely, the Lord is risen and is dwelling right here, in our very midst! This is what I wanted to say to the church on this Easter Sunday, IN THE GREATEST OF HOPE! Amen.