

The Resurrection of Our Lord
Mark 16.1-8
April 12, 2009
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

They didn't realize it was Easter. The women woke (if they had ever slept) before the sun rose, to be on the road with first light. Their hearts were heavy with grief, but their hands were full of purpose. They carried spices to enfold in Jesus' grave clothes and perfumed oil to anoint His cold body. This was to be their last act of loving devotion for their Master, a way to minister one last time to the beloved Lord who had ministered to them, and their feeble attempt to cover up the smell of death in the tomb of the One who had brought them life.

One of the women that Easter Day whose heart was overcast by a Good Friday pall was Mary Magdalene. I have an Easter egg here with a beautiful purple iris painted on it. The iris is Mary Magdalene's flower, in particular the purple iris with sunshine yellow accents in the center of each petal and in the middle of the flower. The purple symbolizes both sadness and healing. The yellow represents joy!

All we know about Mary Magdalene before she met Jesus is that she was very, very ill. Spiritually she was desperately sick, and she probably was mentally or physically too. What the Bible says is that she was possessed by seven demons. One would be bad enough. Seven was legion. Mary was as good as dead. Until she met Jesus. I'd say He gave her back her life, but that would mean she became her old self again, and that's not true. God's healing touch never sends us backwards, but always forwards. God's promise is that we will become a new creation in Christ, never that we'll be our "old" selves ever again!

Before she met Jesus, Mary Magdalene was breathing but not really alive. Jesus raised her up from the ranks of the living dead. He healed her and cast out her sadness and replaced it with joy. She could not have loved Him more. Mary followed Him wherever He went, because

life apart from Him was not life at all. Following meant walking **with** Him, but also living **like** Him. Mary was not a groupie, but a disciple.

She followed Him all the way to Calvary. She and the other women were dogged in their faithfulness, accompanying our Lord Jesus as best they could, given the tumult of His arrest, trial, sentencing and death. They watched the crucifixion from a distance. Their hearts broke, but their feet and fear did not carry them away, as the men's feet and fear had. They faithfully kept vigil, trooping from one place to another behind Jesus and His captors. After He died, they still were on duty, staying to see Joseph of Arimathea remove Jesus' body from the cross, and tracking him and whoever helped him right to the tomb where Jesus' shrouded corpse was left. They needed to know where He was, so they could return and tenderly prepare His battered body. All they knew was that it was Friday. They didn't know that Easter was coming.

Those ladies were faithful, faithful, faithful, even after hope had drained from their hearts. Many of you know what it's like. A loved one or a relationship or a job or a dream has died, and it feels like there's no good reason to go on, no sense in continuing to care, no point in summoning energy to act. But by the grace of God, we do. We put one foot in front of another, we continue to care, we summon energy to do what we need to do, we do what we can do (like the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume who anointed Jesus), not because we expect any emotional payback, but because God has given us grace to be faithful. Sometimes we dance as we serve, like Mary Magdalene, amazed at how God has transformed our lives with His healing touch. Sometimes we move with leaden feet, burdened with our private griefs. But by the grace of God we remain faithful to our commitments to loved ones and to God.

God blesses faithfulness and faithful followers. God surprises them with joy. Mary and the women didn't realize it was Easter. Sometimes we don't, either. God surprised them so much by sending that young man clothed in pure white, heaven's light, to the tomb ahead of them that they were frightened and stunned into being silent as the sphinx. He said, "Go, tell!"

but they said to each other, “Mum’s the word.” God wasn’t finished with them yet. Thankfully our salvation wasn’t riding on their obedience to God’s command to spread the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection that day. Our salvation was riding on Jesus’ obedience to His Father’s will, and that was constant and complete.

There’s always more of the story to be told. St. Mark’s Gospel ends abruptly and strangely with the women’s stunned silence. But God wasn’t finished with them yet. We know at some point their stunned surprise gave way to belief and joy, and someone spilled the beans of the Good News, otherwise there wouldn’t be a story for us to hear or tell today.

May God speak to your heart today so you realize your role in God’s story and God’s role in yours. May you be deeply, doggedly faithful to promises you have made, to people in your life, to responsibilities you have been given. God **will** bless your faithfulness and surprise you with joy. Even when we don’t realize it in the moment, it **is** Easter after all. Like Mary Magdalene, our sickness has been or shall be met with Christ’s healing, and our sadness shall be overcome by resurrection joy. “Christ is risen, alleluia! He is risen indeed, alleluia!” Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham