

Why Are we Easter People?

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Easter Sunday

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As we heard read in the scripture lesson this morning Mary Magdalene went to the tomb the first day of the week. It is pointed out in scripture that it was still dark as she went to the tomb. I can imagine walking in the darkness and the smell of the flowers and plants as it was in a garden. Why do the scriptures point out that it was dark? Does John tell us this piece of information simply by accident? She could not visit the tomb the prior day because it was the Sabbath, So I believe that she was anxious and wanted to get an early start to get to the place where Jesus was laid and continue to honor and grieve for Jesus. But is there still more to the meaning of the darkness? If we read the gospel of John it talks a lot about light and darkness. We are told that Jesus is life, and that life is light. And, that the light shines in the darkness. In another section of John, it talks about Nicodemus visiting Jesus in the darkness, he was coming from the darkness into the light of life (Jesus). And yet again in the book of John Jesus says, "Light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness instead of the light because their deeds are evil." People who do evil hate the light, why? Because the light will expose their evil. On the flip side, whoever lives by truth comes closer to the light.

In the gospel of John darkness is represented as chaos, fear, unbelief, despair and many other things. Light can represent truth, faith, hope, and salvation. We could come to the conclusion that since Mary was in the dark as she arrived at the tomb that she was still feeling a sense of chaos, fear, unbelief, despair and a number of other emotions; just think about what she had experienced in the days before. I cannot imagine the emotional roller coaster she was going through. Look back to Jesus arrival and the excitement of Jerusalem and the people as he entered, crowds gathered and people waving branches and placing them and their cloaks in front of Jesus. Then Jesus was arrested and accused and brutally beaten in front of the people, he was mocked and spat on, rotten food was thrown at him, and he was hung on a cross. Just take a walk in Mary's shoes. She was one of the few that stood by Jesus the whole time. She watched as the person that she had spent so much time with was tortured. She watched as they pounded the nails into his hands and feet, she heard his cries

from the cross and she heard Jesus cry out, "it is finished!" She was there when they pierced his side as blood and water came out. She watched as they took his lifeless body down from the cross, and she knew where they placed his body.

Mary was a big part of Jesus movement. Just think of all the things that she had seen and done with Jesus and now all of that had come to an abrupt halt. All of the plans that they had made, all of the dreams that they had talked about, were gone. Her and the disciples thought that the whole movement had died with Jesus. She was now reduced to weeping and wailing and remembering all the good times that they had shared around the dinner table, when she witnessed the healings, the laughter as Jesus said let the children come to me, and the joy. But now what was she to do? Where would she come up with meaning for her life again? She was walking in the darkness headed to pay respects to the only one that had given her hope, the one that healed her from her demons, the one that had helped to reveal the light to her. But when she arrived what happened? The stone was rolled away and Jesus body was gone. Can you just imagine the shock and pain she must have felt in that moment?

I can only imagine, early on in Elaine and I's marriage I arrived home one night, and our front door was open. As I went into the house, I called for her to let her know that I was home. There was no answer, so I called out again, no answer. I looked on the counter and her purse was there. I looked in the garage and her car was in there. I checked the house, I checked the yard; and I checked the back garage, no Elaine. At that moment my heart sunk, I started calling people checking with neighbors and I became frantic. Why would the front door be open, her purse on the counter, her car there and no sign of her. I can only relate to Mary and her feeling of franticness when she approached and saw Jesus body missing. How could this horrible situation get any worse? How evil could someone be to take Jesus body, all of the emotions and thoughts racing through her head.

So, what did Mary do? Scriptures tell us that she started crying deeper and then she turned and ran to go find Peter and John and she told them that Jesus body was gone. They all returned and sure enough they saw the stone rolled away and John believed what she had said, he had visual confirmation. Someone stole Jesus body from the tomb. In the darkness they all saw and believed that Jesus was taken. Then Peter and John returned home. I am not sure why maybe they thought that there was nothing else to see. Maybe they went on to share the

news with family. But Mary remaining steadfast to Jesus stayed behind she was still upset, confused, maybe even wanted to find more answers amidst her grief. As she remained, she sat or maybe even knelt in the empty tomb and continued to cry. Then we are told that two angels appeared one at the head of the place where Jesus was laid and one at the foot. They asked Mary why she was crying. She in her grief and confusion maybe or panic, responds not really thinking that these are angels talking to me says, "someone has stolen Jesus body", as she turns her head away. Just in her peripheral vision is another figure standing at that moment. But in the darkness her unbelief has taken over, she is still focused on someone stealing Jesus body, she is still in shock, grieving, she is truly out of sorts.

How often are we so caught up in our daily lives that we do not see Jesus even when he is standing right in front of us? Think about the times that you have been at the gas station and the attendant is having a bad day. Did you see Jesus in that moment? Did you take a moment to talk to that person and maybe even offer to pray for them? Are we in such a hurry from one activity to the next that we miss opportunities like taking a moment to help someone put something large in their car, holding the door for someone, simply giving someone a compliment, it is easy to miss Jesus when we are walking in the darkness, as Mary was that morning. We can easily miss Jesus when we are thinking of physical stuff, or worldly things. Is it no wonder that we are living in times of such unbelief! Jesus is everywhere, he is all around us. Do you see him? As Mary turned and brought Jesus into full view; she still did not see him. Have you ever done that? You are looking at something, but you are not seeing it? Simple thought, I sometimes misplace things, my wife can attest to this. I frantically search the house, look in the drawer that I am sure I put it in multiple times. Elaine goes to the same drawer and pulls it right out. That is looking but not seeing. So as Mary is looking, she thinks that this is the gardener, why not she is in a garden right. She says, "Sir if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." At that point Jesus replied, he simply said her name, "Mary." At that moment everything changed. It was all when he called her name. It resounded in her and hit her like a rushing wave. The truth and the light finally break-through in that moment. This is the moment of Resurrection. Think about it no angels announced Jesus being raised, and not even Jesus spoke this. Jesus calling Mary's name is the announcement. It was all done by Jesus telling Mary who he is, calling her name.

There is so much power in a name. Just recall those times that your mom or dad called you by your first and middle name. Was there power in that? How about when they used your first, middle and last name, oh you knew you were in for it then, did you not. Our name is a sound, but it is more than that our name is who we are. If we think about it, it was not Jesus voice that Mary recognized, it was Jesus speaking her name. That is profound to me, that her hearing her name is the turning point. At that point nothing will ever be the same. See the world can be without meaning until God's love enters in and gives it meaning. What does Easter mean to us? It means that nothing will ever be the same again. Jesus is calling our name.

The resurrected Jesus becomes real when we hear our name called by Jesus and we are resurrected with him. We need to focus on leaving the worldly things behind that hold us from seeing Jesus. If we would only step out of the darkness, we can see the light of Jesus. This is why we are Easter people. We are Easter people because Jesus is calling our name. He is calling us to love our neighbors, pray for those who persecute us, feed the hungry, clothe those that need clothing, hear the broken hearted and help them, reach out to others that are marginalized, help others to see Jesus love through us and share his love with them. When we move towards these things it changes our vision; it removes the blinders and helps us to see through God's eyes.

Jesus was not the only one resurrected on Easter morning, Mary experienced the resurrection as well. Her despair and brokenness, chaos, fear, unbelief, her darkness was gone as she ran towards Jesus, the light of life. Mary ran and held onto Jesus as soon as she knew it was him. What was Jesus response though? He told her not to hold onto him. Why? One he wants us to share him with others and not to hold onto him for ourselves, and two he was telling her that everything had changed and that she could not cling to the way things were. Everything was made anew.

The good news for us as Easter people on this Easter morning is this. Jesus has returned to his father and our father, to his God and our God. Jesus death and resurrection paid the price for us all and paved the way for us to bridge the great divide between us and our Heavenly Father.

Jesus final instructions to Mary were this, "Go to my brother and tell them..." She was to go and share the good news. Jesus has called each one of us by name, he has called us to go out and share the good news. Not just by our words but also our actions and how we live our lives. We need to declare that we see Jesus in everything and everywhere. Jesus came into Jerusalem humble and he calls us to humble ourselves as we care for the sick, give food to the hungry through our food pantry, clothe people, build wells for clean water, serve and teach bible study at Redemption House, Serve and provide people at In as Much. When we do these things and many more as Calvary and Easter people, we are living examples and witnesses to the resurrected Jesus.

This is why we are Easter people, and this is why we are here this morning. Jesus has come to make us new and share in his resurrection and to become who we really are – Children of God.

Christ has risen! He is risen indeed!