

In Nomine Jesu

Jesus Clings to Us

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

He is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Of course Mary, Peter and John didn't know that yet in our reading for this morning. This morning, as the Sun just begins to rise on the other side of the mountains, you have been gathered here today to hear of those who first made it to the tomb 2,000 years ago. You are here to hear about the *fact* that Jesus is not dead anymore. And that is what you will hear. Our text begins:

And the first of the Sabbath Mary the Magdalene came when it was still in the early darkness to the tomb, and she saw the stone removed from the tomb.¹

Note that our reading for this morning is from the Gospel of John. Generally speaking John doesn't tell you something that he knows you already know, unless he's trying to make a point with it. He does fill in some of the details for you though. Even though we know that Mary went to the tomb with other women that morning, it's Mary who John is focusing on.

Mary was going to tomb in order to perform the Jewish burial rites. She came up to the tomb expecting to find it closed with some guards likely keeping an eye on things. She was not expecting the stone to have been rolled away, yet that is what she finds. Her response to this unforeseen circumstance is fairly straight forward, as our text declares:

Then she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, who was loved by Jesus, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have placed Him."²

¹ John 20:1

² John 20:2

Mary jumps to conclusions. She assumes the worst. She believes that the Jewish leaders or maybe the Roman guards have taken her Lord and hidden Him from her and His other disciples.

Now making assumptions isn't really as bad as it is made out to be most of the time. People make honest assumptions just about every day of their lives that are based off of their prior experiences. So you can't fault Mary all that much for assuming that a dead guy didn't just get up and walk off on His own.

What you can fault her for though, is not believing the Word of her Lord who told her that He would get up walk out of that tomb. Here she is showing her unbelief in the Word of Jesus. You also must be careful that you do not let your everyday assumptions get in the way of your believing the Word of God. Your everyday experience likely suggests to you that a story about someone rising from the dead is just that, a story. After all, how many people have been raised from the dead after three days of being in the grave?

But the Word of Jesus is Truth. Believe in Him and believe in His Word, no matter what your everyday experiences may be telling you. Jesus did die for your sins in order to full cover over you. Jesus did rise from the dead, for you, that you might know and believe you are right with the Father.

Peter and John not only have trouble believing Jesus' Word, they have trouble believing Mary's word too. They have to go and see for themselves:

Then they went out, Peter and the other disciple and went to the tomb.⁴ And the two of them were running together, and the other disciple ran ahead quicker than Peter and came first to the Tomb.⁵ And stooping he saw lying the linen clothes, but he did not enter.⁶ Then came also Simon Peter following him, and he went into the tomb, and he saw the linen cloth lying.⁷ And the facecloth, which was around the head of him, not with the linen clothes lying but separate folded up in one place. ⁸ Therefore also the other disciple then went in who came first to the

tomb, and he saw and believed. ⁹ For not yet had they known the scriptures that he must from the dead rise. ¹⁰ Then the same disciples went out again.³

Here we need to be careful not to let details distract us too much from the point of the text. Peter and John both were running, generally considered an undignified thing to do. John ran faster than Peter, and got there first. However, Peter got there and then actually went into the tomb, rather than stopping at the entrance like John did.

What they see when they enter is what's important. They see linen cloths. They also see the face cloth lying folded up. Now I'm about to dive deep here with just a little bit of speculation, but I promise there's a good point to be made here, so take a deep breathe.

Perhaps you may remember when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead earlier in John's Gospel. When He did so, Lazarus came out of the tomb still bound by the linen burial cloths. At Jesus' resurrection Jesus' burial cloths are set aside. What could this mean?

I would point to our epistle reading for today. Our epistle reads thus, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."⁴ When Lazarus was raised by Jesus, the bonds of death, symbolized by the linen burial cloths, were still on him. When Jesus rose from the dead, those bonds were cast off. They had no power over Jesus anymore.

Moreover, Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead. This means that there will come a day when you also will be able to cast off those bonds of death. First you will go through death as a gateway, unless of course Jesus comes back before you die. Then you too will rise like Jesus. The linen burial cloths of death will be cast off from you. You will then be clothed in the robe of righteousness given to you by

³ John 20:3-10

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:20-21

Jesus. You will then live forever with Him into eternity, as John tells us in his Revelation:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ... Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sire, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”⁵

Coming back up from our allegorical tangent, the question comes up. What did John believe? John states that he believed, but he also states that they had not yet at that point understood from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead.

Well for the sake of expediency, let’s give John the benefit of the doubt and say that he did indeed believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Not that he seems to do much with that information. We can understand that he would probably have been in a little bit of shock knowing that Jesus was alive again. But let’s press forward, for our reading continues:

¹¹ But Mary stood by outside the tomb weeping, then as she continued weeping she stooped into the tomb.¹² And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where used to lay the body of Jesus. ¹³ And they said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?” She said to them, “They have removed my Lord, and I do not know where they have put Him.”⁶

This is only the third time that angels are mentioned in the Gospel of John, and also the final time. It is the first time that they have said anything. Why would John include them now? From the other Gospels we know that there were angels involved in the discovery on Easter morning, but why did John include them in his retelling? Let’s look at what they say. They see Mary weeping, and they ask, *“Woman, why are you weeping?”*

⁵ Revelation 7:9,13-14 (ESV)

⁶ John 20:11-13

Mary did not yet believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. She was still under the impression that someone had stolen His body. These people hadn't let Mary perform the burial rites that all Jews were supposed to have performed on their bodies.

So Mary was weeping, and the angels try to console her. Let's see where else weeping shows up in John's Gospel. I'll give you one guess; we already talked about it. At the raising of Lazarus from the dead, another Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, was weeping. Not only her though, Jesus was also weeping. It almost seems like these two events are connected somehow, huh? We know what happened with Lazarus. After seeing Mary weeping, Jesus wept Himself, and proceeded to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus predicted this moment with Mary though, at least in part. Earlier in John He said, *"Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy."*⁷ Well joy is good, let's get to that joy:

As she was saying this she turned back and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you seeking?" She supposed that he was a gardener, she said to Him, "Lord, if you removed him, say to me where you placed him, and I will take him away."⁸

Well, that wasn't very joyful was it? Jesus was standing right in front of Mary, and she still didn't see Him. She allowed her loss to blind her both physically and spiritually to the reality that Jesus was standing there talking to her.

This is also what unbelief does. It blinds you to reality. It takes what you should see clearly, and twists it. She turns around sees a Man, but because she doesn't believe the Word of Jesus, that's all that she can see. Her unbelief warps who she sees, and makes her think that this Guy might be a gardener.

⁷ John 16:20 (ESV)

⁸ John 20:14-15

Sadly, your unbelief does the same thing to you sometimes. Sometimes it takes what you see right in front of you and turns it into something else in your head. But it also messes with what you hear. Mary's main problem wasn't that she didn't believe what she saw. Her real problem was that she hadn't believed what Jesus had told her. That's also your problem as far as unbelief is concerned.

Jesus has given you many words to believe, based only on His word. Your unbelief would have you twist His words so that you don't believe them, and only use them to further your own goals. This is who your fallen sinful nature would have you be. That's where Mary was. However, Jesus wasn't going to leave her in that state, just as He wills to not leave you in doubt and unbelief, as our text indicates:

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned around at this and she said to Him in Aramaic, "Rabboni, (which means Teacher)."¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, for not yet have I ascended to the Father. But journey to the brothers of me, and say to them, 'I ascend to the Father of me, and the Father of you, and my God and your God.'¹⁸ Mary the Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and the things He said."⁹

You will struggle with unbelief just like Mary did. That doesn't mean you are any less of a Christian than anyone else. Everyone doubts every now and then. But when you do doubt, know this. He's calling you by name just like He called Mary by name. Just think of where He first did this, Holy Baptism. Remember your Baptism and you will be led to recall He calls you by your name attached to His Name.

Jesus wants you, all of you. He died to save all of humanity. He rose and cast off the bonds of death in order to prove to you that He was successful. He did this for every single man, woman, and child who ever has and ever will live on this earth. That most certainly includes you. When you struggle with your unbelief, Jesus will call you out of it. He might not do it quickly, or exactly when you want Him to.

⁹ John 20:16-18

Yet, He keeps His means of calling you by Name available. He will not abandon you. He will give you His Word and His Sacraments. Maybe He will give you His Word through a Pastor. Maybe He will do it through your own reading, or through a friend. He might even use your memories of His Word. But somehow, some way, He will break through your unbelief, unless you harden your own heart and refuse to let Him.

For many of you, He likely has already broken through to you. Maybe He even did it today as you heard this scripture text read. Maybe you're wondering, "Well now what?" Well, I would suggest that Mary is a pretty good example that you are free to follow. She went and announced that she had seen the Lord, and told the disciples what she had seen. Though I grant you that no one believed her, but that just means no one believing you isn't a good excuse. You also are free to share the Word of your salvation with those who need to hear it. Jesus is calling them by name as well.

Jesus is alive. He has cast off death. He broke through Mary's unbelief and gave her His Word to believe and share. She wasn't allowed to cling to Him just yet, because He still had to ascend to our Father.

You have no such limitations. You are free to cling to Jesus. You are free to hold Him as tight as you possibly can. You can do this by hearing His words and holding them in your ears, and by eating His body and His blood. You are also free to know that while it is good to hold onto Him, what is most necessary is that He holds you. And He does. And He will continue to hold you to Himself even through death itself.

Now may the peace that passes understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

He is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Resurrection Dawn Matins

April 5, 2015

Psalm 16; Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:12-25; John 20:1-18

Vicar Christopher M. Craig

Soli Deo Gloria