

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*11But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

"It is finished."

Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Dead. Jesus was dead that Friday so long ago. He felt no pain when the spear was thrust into his side. Dead.

"Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so because it was the Jewish day of preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

We will never hear again of Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus. These two who were so faithful (when Jesus' disciples were nowhere to be found) simply disappear from the story.

They did everything right. They dotted all their “i's” and crossed all their “t's”. They got straight A's when it came to being faithful to a friend. But from all that the Bible tells us, we don't know if they ever took part in the Easter joy celebration. They were faithful but did they see the twinkle in God's eye that was Jesus raised from the dead?

No, it was big talking Peter who had crumbled under the pressure who was first to enter the tomb on Easter morning. Mary Magdalene had run to tell him that the stone sealing the tomb was removed. She was afraid of what she would find, if she looked inside, grave robbers surely had been there. So Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved raced to the tomb only to find the cloths that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped around the corpse of Jesus.

But the body was gone. When the disciple whom Jesus loved saw how the cloths were lying there, he realized no one had unwrapped Jesus body, what he saw convinced him that Jesus had been raised by God. He believed.

But then he and Peter went home.

Mary Magdalene was crying. She bent over to look into the tomb, she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying. But she could only think that the body of Jesus had been stolen. Not even seeing angels could convince her otherwise.

Then she turned around, saw Jesus himself, heard him speak, but could only see what she expected: a gardener.

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away."

Then Jesus said, "Mary!" And she knew this was Jesus, alive.

We make this day into something of a circus, with our fine clothes and parades down the center aisle of the church - a party, a celebration. We know Jesus is alive before we even get here. We can't imagine it any other way.

But if we could see into each of our hearts we might find that little is different from that morning so long ago.

Some of us are dotting our “ i's” and crossing our “t's”, working for an A from God when the report card of our life is announced. We are here every week to do what needs to be

done and we can be counted upon. Maybe we shake our heads a little at all the commotion of this day and all the new faces around knowing tomorrow it will all be over and bodies will need to be gotten ready for burial once more.

Some of us are like that disciple whom Jesus loved, believing but then just going home once more.

Some of us are like Mary Magdalene, struggling to believe but then having this overwhelming certainty, knowing Jesus is calling our name. But strangely in all of the New Testament we will never hear of Mary Magdalene after this moment.

Some of us are like Peter - excited, ready to promise anything, to lead any parade, changed by this day so that tomorrow and every tomorrow after it will be a day to celebrate Easter, also.

Do you know what? Jesus is Lord of us all. He knows each of our names, and different as we are from one another he intends to hold us together in his one body, the church.

God has raised Jesus from the dead, death and sin and evil have no power over him nor over you who believe in him.

Jesus is Lord. He is the shepherd of the sheep. He is the way and the truth and the life, he is the resurrection and the life. Whoever you are, no matter what your role today and tomorrow, God wants you to believe and trust in Jesus.

Jesus is what this day and every day is all about. Amen.