

April 9, 2023

Resurrection Faith – from Despair to Delight

John 20:1-18

1.

Easter blessings to you and your family!

This Easter morning, we meet Mary Magdalene. She was the woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). Some argue that she is the same woman who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume (Cf. Luke 7:36 ff.). Others insist that she was a prostitute, but there are no clear proofs to support such claims. What is clear is that she loved and trusted Jesus more than anyone else. All four gospels affirm that Mary Magdalene was one of those who stood near the cross of Jesus and that she was the first person to come to the tomb and encounter the Risen Christ.

Early on Easter morning, Mary went to Jesus' tomb and saw that the stone was removed. She must have been astonished and frightened, so she rushed to the disciples to report what she had witnessed. Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb and entered, while Mary stood crying outside. After the two disciples confirmed the absence of Jesus' body in the tomb and returned home, Mary bent over to investigate and saw two angels. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" (vs. 13) After she replied, Mary turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not recognize him. Jesus asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" (vs. 15)

2.

Why was Mary crying? Because the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, and she thought someone had taken it away. She had no idea who did it or where the body was taken. However, the root of her tears was the lack of faith in the resurrection of the Lord. This unbelief prevented her from recognizing the Risen Christ. Although Mary was one of Jesus' closest followers who stood by him until his death on the cross, she, like the other disciples, was in the depths of despair. She saw the Risen Christ with the eyes of hopelessness when he appeared to her outside the tomb. What if she had understood what it meant when Jesus said he would rise again? What if she had been convinced that God would raise Jesus, just as Jesus himself raised Lazarus?

If we lose faith in Christ and his promise of resurrection, we cannot recognize the Risen Christ. Unbelief in the resurrection leads to despair, and with eyes of despair, we cannot recognize the one who brings hope. Hope and despair cannot coexist, just as light cannot exist with darkness. Mary failed to recognize Jesus after his resurrection because she saw him with eyes of despair while he was standing in the light of hope.

You may remember what happened to the two disciples who were walking toward Emmaus. "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:15-16). They were heading to Emmaus because they were discouraged and depressed by the death of their master, Jesus. They found no reason to stay in Jerusalem. They, too, failed to recognize the Risen Christ for the same reason as Mary, although he accompanied them and talked with them for a long while on the way.

3.

Mary Magdalene failed to recognize Jesus at first sight, but she did recognize him when he called her name. Calling one's name has multiple meanings. In this case, Jesus called her name to express his love and care for her. He also called her name to help her restore her faith in his resurrection. After she recognized him, she stopped crying and became a powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ.

As the two disciples approached Emmaus, they urged Jesus to stay with them. He accepted their offer, and while at the table, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. It was then that their eyes were opened, and they recognized him (Luke 24:30-31a). The same act that Jesus had done at the last supper in Jerusalem helped them turn from despair to hope. With faith and hope in their hearts, they were able to recognize the Risen Christ. After recognizing him, they returned to Jerusalem to witness the resurrection of their Lord.

Today, we know that Christ has risen and that he is alive. He calls each of us by name and invites us to his table, where he takes bread and the cup and gives them to us so that our eyes may be opened, and we may recognize him. By awakening our sleeping souls, strengthening our weakened faith, and restoring our hope for eternal life, Christ shows us the way to sing a song of hope even in the midst of despair.

Just like he asked Mary Magdalene, the Risen Christ asks us today, "Why are you crying?" This question means, "Why do you fall into despair?" Friends, how often do we struggle with life's challenges? How often are we frustrated and discouraged? How many times do we fail to recognize the Risen Christ standing by us and cry? As Easter people, we should never lose hope, for the Risen Christ is the source of hope and courage. We should never cry in despair, for the Risen Christ is the source of joy. Therefore, my friends in Christ, we must encourage and inspire each other with the resurrection faith and never be discouraged in any situation.

May the Risen Christ bless you and keep you always in his love and grace. Amen.