

## *Weeping outside the tomb*

Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, July 22, 2020

Church of the Ascension, Chicago

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“Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and 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. They 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.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus 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.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus 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.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

- John 20:11-18

*Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.*

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I wonder how many dozens and dozens of times I’ve read or heard this resurrection gospel passage in my life; yet I’ve never paused here.

*Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.*

It makes sense, I guess, that we don’t pause here, especially those of us who are preachers. This scene from John is from the preferred primary Gospel appointed for Easter Day, every year. We naturally rush past Mary and her grief to get to the empty tomb.

*Let’s see the mysterious, glorious angels where Jesus had been laid to rest in death.*

We are eager for the surprise moment—that moment when Jesus speaks Mary’s name, and she recognizes him. She has the very first inklings of what that recognition means. In the twinkling of an eye, her weeping turns to joy.

In our giddiness, we have likely ignored her weeping outside the tomb. We rushed right past her. Grief is not anywhere we want to stop anyway, is it?

Do you know that this is the only place in the resurrection accounts of all four gospels where someone is shown all alone? We’re not told if she was there as long as it takes to read the verse or for a long time. But Mary is weeping. Outside the tomb of the Most Beloved.

You and I know weeping. We know the pit and disorientation of it. And we know that weeping all alone can be all the more poignant and raw.

Mary’s weeping has lodged in me, I suppose, and I’m inviting you to join us, in part due to a diocesan-wide conversation with Bishop Lee today. A few priest colleagues, fellow

rectors, were asked to share their experiences of their parish's returns to in-person worship. One was Jenny Replogle, co-Rector, along with her husband, at St. Paul's, Peoria.

Explaining her experience and that of her congregation on their first Sunday back, Mother Replogle said:

*We prepared everyone as well as we could, and we did a good job. We'd explained that it would not be just like returning to what it was like before. We planned well.*

*But I myself wasn't prepared.*

*Months ago, when I anticipated coming back together, I imagined it would be like Easter. This wasn't Easter.*

*I especially wasn't prepared for the grief, she said. That's what I saw when I looked out over the faces of my people, the grief – all of the toll in so many ways that has hit all of them, all of us, over these months. And the grief of the absence of all of who were not there with us, those who would like to have been with us and couldn't be.*

*Our young families are mostly telling me that they're Zoomed out. They're saying that they will be staying away for now. They don't know how they'd explain to their kids that they can't go sit with their friends in church ...*

Mother Replogle was also talking about us, wasn't she? Or at least she was forecasting some of what I anticipate on our own first Sunday back. And the losses and griefs of her people these past months have surely resembled our own.

If so, I wonder if you and I might feel free to pause with me at a place in the Gospel that we tend to rush past. Go ahead if you're willing and able. Stand with Mary Magdalene outside the tomb. Weep.

If you joined us for Evening Prayer, you heard Cynthia Perrizo read the beautiful words of St. Paul from 2 Corinthians. He describes our God as “...the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation. who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.” (2 Cor. 3b-4)

Beautiful words, and wonderful post-resurrection hope there! Fitting for what becomes Mary Magdalene's resurrection consolation and wonder. Thanks be to God!

It's fair to imagine that Mary Magdalene herself had a special gift for consoling, more so after the Beloved resurrected One, having come forth from the tomb, says her name.

*But before that, Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.*

*She's alone there.*

*Maybe she would welcome our company.*

*Amen.*