

April 4, 2021  
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Easter Sunrise Service  
John 20:1-18

### “Sorrow Turned to Joy”

“While it was still dark” Mary made her way to the tomb. That first Easter began before the dawn, while the stench of death was still in the air, while Rome still dominated the lives of Jewish people like an immovable force, while crucifixion was still a terrorizing fact of life for ordinary folk.

Mary was the first to see the stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. She ran and told Peter and the other disciple. There was a lot of running going on that morning. Mary ran to tell them. Those two pillars of the church made a race out of who could get to the tomb first.

They went in, saw the linen wrappings lying there, and then they went home. John gives us an indication that the other disciple had some sort of epiphany. Beyond that, we know nothing other than that they came, they saw, and they left.

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.” For me, this year, that’s a key detail. The two disciples went home, but Mary lingered. She wept. She took time to grieve the death of her friend and the disappearance of his body. That led to the defining experience of her life. She was the first to experience the risen Christ.

Here’s my question. When do we grieve? This past year, in our country alone, over half-a-million people have died from Covid-19. At what point do we, collectively, allow the reality of that to affect us? Before we could even get our minds around a mass murder in Georgia, another one took place at a grocery store in Colorado. Now, there’s a trial for the killing of George Floyd.

When do we grieve all this? Poet Ann Weems writes, “We in the church are in danger of becoming a tearless people, unable to rage even in a starless abyss.” She writes, “We have imitated a smiling society, glossing over the hurt, the oppression, the

peacelessness on earth, or we have become caustic and cynical and despairing, insisting on looking the other way..."

Mary didn't look the other way. She stood weeping outside the tomb. As she grieved, she looked in. You know the story. She saw angels. Then, she had this touching encounter with Jesus after first mistaking him for the gardener. In that moment of recognition, Mary's tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy.

The message of that first Easter was not only that Jesus was alive. It wasn't only that death was defeated. Resurrection was God's response to the domination and violence of the empire. Because death was defeated, anything was possible. The future was open.

There's a hymn of the church titled "Easter People, Raise Your Voices." How do you know if you're an Easter person? If you hold onto your humanity in the face of forces that cause us to "gloss over the hurt" or become cynical, you might be an Easter person. If you cry with those who cry and laugh with those who laugh, you might be an Easter person. If you refuse to cooperate with injustice no matter how pervasive it is, you might be an Easter person.

As Mary was grieving, there was this extraordinary revelation. Because she remained, she received the greatest assignment. Jesus told her to go and tell the disciples I am ascending to my God and your God. The word evangel means "one who runs with a message." Mary became the first evangelist. When she told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," she became the first to proclaim the risen Christ. She became the first Easter person.

Now, it's time to raise our voices.

Our message is that Christ is risen.

Death has been defeated.

Domination and violence do not get the last word.

Sorrow has turned to joy.