

## “Encountering The Risen Lord”

- I. Introduction: Tonight, you will be hearing the voice of Mary Magdalene, one of the first, if not the first, to learn of Christ’s Resurrection as depicted in the gospel of Matthew. Her story reminds us of the fear, love, sacrifice, courage, and joy of those who first encountered our risen Lord. I believe her story can be our story, her reactions our reactions, and her questions, our questions.
  
- II. Hurry, we must hurry! I am afraid, so afraid. Hurry, Mary, my friend, we don’t want anyone to see us. The streets are filled with soldiers and temple guards – all just waiting for a chance to put someone in their place. Hurry, we must hurry!

I know the others told us not to leave, not to go anywhere until the city empties out and the troops go off of alert. They warned us, “You saw what happened to Jesus didn’t you? Something like that could easily happen to you.” We pleaded with them to come with us, and they said no. Maybe they were right, but we had to come. We ran out of time on Friday. We have to finish anointing his body. We can’t just leave his body there, hastily wrapped and alone. We have to make things right for Jesus. . . . Everything seems so still this morning.

- III. The Memories. My mind is flooded with memories. I remember what happened to Jesus on these streets when he came through the city gates – everyone was so happy, waving palm branches and shouting hosanna. What a royal welcome! Jesus had smiled and waved. But I could tell even then that something wasn’t right. I could see it in his eyes – his beautiful eyes. It was like he knew something, something about the future that the rest of us didn’t know. He had told us even before we’d reached Jerusalem that he was going to die. But we really hadn’t believed him. I wish we had understood. If only we had listened closer to what he’d said. Maybe we could have done something to prevent it.

It’s not too much further now. We just need to get through the city gate. There are so many things I remember. I remember when I first met Jesus. I had gone to hear him

teaching in Capernaum and liked him the very first time I met him. I was living a pretty wild life, and then I met Jesus. When he spoke, it was as if he was talking directly to me. I knew that he was talking to everyone, but what he said was what I needed to hear. "Don't throw your life away," he said. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul." I'd heard that before, but never the way he said it. Then he said, "Love your neighbor as yourself – on this hangs all the law and the prophets." I wasn't into the law, to tell you the truth. I was my own law. I lived as I pleased and liked it that way. When people tried to talk with me about how I was living, I just said, "It's none of your business what I do, just leave me alone."

I was never the same after I met Jesus. I went to hear him whenever I could, and he and I used to talk sometimes. "Mary," he would say, "What's important to you?" After a while Jesus asked whether I wanted to go with him and the others throughout Galilee and then later to go with them to Jerusalem. All along I could feel it; I was changing. How do I put it? "I became a new person" and I felt a new kind of love. I didn't constantly look down on others. It didn't matter so much anymore what I wanted. And I didn't have to have what I wanted right away. In fact, I began to want different things. Increasingly, what I wanted was just to be with Jesus and with the others. At times I surprised myself. It was like there was a new Mary. Sometimes she surprised even me.

- IV. Then Came Jerusalem. Everything was going so well and then this happened. Jesus talked more and more about coming to Jerusalem to die. That made me uneasy. It really made all of us uneasy. We would talk among ourselves: "Surely he doesn't mean that he's actually going to die." I remember the men saying, "If anyone tries to hurt Jesus, we'll take care of him. But the strongest of all the disciples – "Peter the Rock" -- deserted Jesus when he got arrested. Except for John and a few of us women, everyone left when it became clear that we might be arrested as well. John was the only one of the twelve who stayed near the cross. He loved Jesus very much.

And Jesus crucified. I don't even want to think about it. Jesus was in such pain and we couldn't do anything. I kept thinking why would anyone want to treat him this way? He hadn't done anything to hurt them. All he'd done was to tell the truth. The only way I could stay there with him at the cross was to look into his eyes and try to remember all the good things – like the times that he healed so many, just by touching them. Jesus loved life. It's not fair. It's just not fair.

- V. We're getting close now. Just passed through the city gate. Oh, I'm worried about how to do this. I hope the guards are there to help push back the stone at the door of the tomb. I hope they don't chase us away. Wait. I can see the tomb. The earth is shaking!

What is that bright light? Mary, I'm so scared. The white light is moving the stone. Look, even the guards are afraid, they are running away. Do you hear that? It's as if the light is speaking. What is that he's saying? "Don't be afraid. You're looking for Jesus?" Yes, of course we are! "Don't be afraid. He has been raised up. Look over there, his body is gone. He has returned to Galilee where he said he would go. Go and tell Peter and the others. You don't need to be afraid, you will see him again." I don't know what to think! What does he mean, "you will see him again?" Is someone trying to play a cruel trick on us? Could this really be true? Has Jesus come back to life? I would so like to be with him again. Let's go and tell the others. Wait, Mary, who is that? I recognize his voice -- it's Jesus! Is it really you, Lord?

- VI. The Resurrection story. As Mary Magdalene and her friend experienced, we need to make choices, sometimes ones that require great courage and sacrifice, in order to participate in the resurrection story. God honored the faith and courage of the two Marys with the experience of being the first to see their resurrected Lord. There are no passive participants in the resurrection. The two Marys went to the tomb not knowing what they would discover there or if they would be permitted access to Jesus' body. Their actions required considerable courage, but their love for Jesus provided them with the strength to move through their fear rather than be frozen by it. Resurrection experiences, such as the two Mary's personal encounters with their resurrected Lord, are nurtured by love and sacrifice.

Both the angel and Jesus himself gave the two Marys the responsibility to go and tell others that Jesus had risen from the dead. Those of us who know the story are charged with the responsibility of telling others. Many of you are here tonight because someone else shared that story with you. A priest once told me his view that God has no grandchildren, only children. By that he meant that each one of us has to decide whether we are willing to encounter the risen Christ. In that encounter we ourselves can experience the joy of the two Marys in the resurrection.

- VII Conclusion. Experiencing the resurrected Jesus is an ongoing process that should continue throughout our lives. If the resurrection story has become a bit too familiar and uninspiring, it is important for us to breathe new energy, new life, into our experience of the resurrection. We, you and I, are a people of new life with all of the costs, the wonders, and the joys that come from participating in the resurrection. May we be reminded tonight of the fear, love, sacrifice, courage, and joy of those who first encountered our risen Lord. Jesus' resurrection is a story with an ending we already know and can count on. It is a story that takes place both here and in the life to come.

Thanks be to God.