

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *He Lives!*
Service Theme: *To Dry Tears and Remove Fears*

Sermon Theme: *There's Something About Mary*
April 9, 2023 (Easter Sunday) John 20:1-18

There's Something about Mary. No, I'm not referring to the late '90s Farrelly Brothers comedy, which isn't exactly Easter Sunday appropriate. I'm talking about Mary Magdalene. There's something about her. Something so approachable. So relatable. I think that's why the Apostle John highlights Mary Magdalene in his Easter Sunday Gospel account.

By God's inspiration, John wrote his Gospel account of the life and ministry of Jesus at least a couple decades later than Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's. So much of John's Gospel fills in gaps, or focuses on themes the other three Gospels don't. So while Matthew, Mark, and Luke refer to multiple women going to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning, John only highlights Mary Magdalene. Why? Because there's something about Mary.

Mary was from Magdala (hence, Magdalene), a prosperous fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mary was one of the women who most prominently followed, supported, and supplied the needs of Jesus' ministry. And she had good reason for doing so. The Bible reveals that Mary had been demon-possessed, and Jesus had driven seven demons out of her!

So we get why Mary had a profound gratefulness and love for Jesus. But not just because he'd done something nice for her. Mary trusted what Jesus taught-- that he was the Messiah God had promised to send!

She'd supported Jesus throughout his ministry. She'd been at Calvary as he died. She'd watched from a distance as his body was hastily

prepared and placed in a tomb. And now, her grief and helplessness palpable, she and the other women set out in the early morning darkness, laden with spices. At least they could give Jesus a proper burial.

But as they drew near, the sunrise revealed a horrific scene—Jesus' tomb was open. The stone had been removed, leaving a gaping mouth at the tomb that mirrored their own gaping mouths. And it broke Mary. We get the impression that she didn't even bother looking into the tomb; just takes off running back to Jerusalem to find two of Jesus' main disciples—Peter, and John, the author of this Gospel. You can picture her, choking out the words through sobs, ***“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!”***

As if Jesus' enemies hadn't done enough by beating, mutilating, and killing him, now they wouldn't even let his corpse rest in peace? Or was it grave robbers? Or maybe other disciples had moved it? Regardless, Jesus' body, their last connection to their Lord and teacher, was gone.

Imagine how you'd feel, a couple days after the funeral of someone you love deeply, taking some flowers to decorate their headstone at the cemetery, and finding a big, empty hole in the ground where the body should be. Feel that heartbreak; that confusion; that helplessness. If there was a body in a grave, at least you could still go to remember and honor them, but now even that was gone.

Peter and John set off to see for themselves. By now, the other women had left, and as they caught sight of the open tomb, the two men started running. Note that John makes sure everyone knows he beat Peter in their footrace. I bet the two of them had a good laugh in Heaven, that John just HAD to add that little detail, didn't he? But it's the kind of unnecessary detail that an eyewitness would include when recounting a story from their life, isn't it?

John doesn't go in right away, but Peter, befitting his personality, charges right in. Inside, they found the strips of linen that had wrapped Jesus' body, and the burial cloth that had wrapped his head. But they

were neatly folded, like someone making their bed after waking up. What grave robber or spiteful enemy would take the time and care to do that? It didn't make sense. Unless... As John recounts what went on in his head and heart in that moment, ***“The other disciple...saw and believed.”***

After the two disciples returned to where they were staying, Mary Magdalene arrived back at the tomb. John tells us ***“Mary stood outside the tomb crying,”*** her tears and fears bursting forth. The Greek word for crying isn't a few tears and some sniffles. We're talking uncontrolled sobbing, weeping, and wailing. Ugly crying, if you will.

And that's why there's something about Mary. There's something so relatable, because we've all been Mary. Maybe you're Mary right now this morning. Maybe you've been Mary in the past. Maybe you've never been Mary before, but trust me, your time will come. Why was Mary so broken in that moment? Not just because Jesus was dead, and his body was gone. It was because Mary's hope seemed dead and gone. Everything she'd trusted about Jesus was now uncertain. Everything she'd found comfort and assurance in had disappeared. If Jesus was dead and gone, everything that had given her hope now felt completely hopeless. Without even a body to give a proper burial to, Mary felt hopeless, helpless, and afraid.

That's why we've all been Mary. We know that feeling of hopelessness. Maybe it's because someone you love is dead and buried, or because it feels like your career is dead and buried. Maybe it's because your marriage is broken, your family is broken, your heart is broken, or your body is broken. Maybe it's because the weight of your guilt, or the weight of your responsibilities, or the weight of people's expectations feels suffocating. Maybe it's the fear of failure, or the fear of rejection, or the fear that you have no purpose or identity.

And whether that hopelessness manifests itself in uncontrollable sobbing, or you're the type who buries your emotions down deep so no one knows, but inside you're a trainwreck-- there's something so relatable about Mary. Because we've all been Mary, or are Mary, or will be Mary.

Satan has this dreadful talent of using things like tears and fears to make us forget God's promises. Over and over again in the Gospels, Jesus, toward the end of his ministry, taught his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, but he would then rise again on the third day. And that's just the times the Bible records them. People like Peter, John, Mary, and the other women knew Jesus' promise. They should have been excitedly waiting outside Jesus' tomb on Easter morning like people waiting for their loved ones to arrive at the airport. But instead, they were broken by fear and grief. Because their fears and tears made them forget God's promises.

Satan pulls it on us too. No matter how many times we hear God tell us in his Word, ***“In all things God works for the good of those who love him,”*** ***“I have plans to prosper you and not to harm you,”*** ***“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”*** ***“He who believes in me will live, even though he dies,”*** our fears, tears, and hopelessness make it so easy for us to forget God's unfailing promises.

In her grief and fear, Mary finally peeks into Jesus' empty tomb, to find it occupied by two angels, dressed in white. They asked her, ***“Woman, why are you crying?”*** Whether she didn't realize they were angels, or she was so overwhelmed that she didn't really care, she answered, ***“They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him.”***

You can picture the two angels, with smiles on their faces, shift their eyes over Mary's shoulder. And when she spun around to see what they were looking at—there was Jesus, alive! Only, she didn't recognize him. Whether Jesus looked different, or didn't allow her to recognize him initially, Mary assumed he was the gardener, and asked, ***“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”*** You can picture her grief-filled, tear-filled eyes, frantically searching in all directions, haphazardly trying to figure out what to do, when Jesus says just one word: ***“Mary.”***

And everything changed. Whipping around, Mary cried out, ***“Rabboni!”*** ***“my teacher!”*** and threw herself down, clinging to Jesus

like she'd never let go again. Just that one word--her name—from the living Jesus' lips dried her tears and removed her fears! Because Jesus was alive, Mary again had peace, and love, and forgiveness, and life! Because Jesus was alive, Mary again had sure and certain hope!

There's something about "Mary." Something about her name from Jesus' lips that fills us with the same kind of joy, comfort, and hope. Because you can put your name on Jesus' lips too! Her Easter morning comfort is your comfort too!

Because Jesus lives, he who holds power over death, certainly also holds power over everything you're struggling with. Because Jesus lives, all your sins have been paid for in full. Because Jesus lives, the one who loved you enough to suffer and die for you continues to love you and be with you always. Because Jesus lives, his victory over sin, death, and Satan, is your victory over sin, death, and Satan! Because of Mary's trip to the cemetery, all of our trips to the cemetery are changed forever! With just one word--your name-- on the lips of a resurrected, living, and victorious Savior, our tears are dried, and our fears are removed! Because He lives, all those who trust in him will too!

Jesus gives us that certainty when he tells Mary, ***"Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*** He calls the disciples, "my brothers," even though their last interaction with him had been fleeing, abandoning, and denying him to save their own skin. And yet, he calls them "my brothers." Because through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, every sin is forgiven; paid for in full. That's why Jesus can say his Father is your Father, and his God your God! If Jesus didn't rise, none of that could be true for sinners like us. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, ***"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."***

But Christ has been raised! And because Jesus lives, our sins are gone, and we are dearly loved children of God! If eternal life is won through Jesus, then although we might shed tears of grief, and feel the pain of loss, there's nothing to be afraid of! As we hear Jesus speak our name with so much love, compassion, and comfort, be reminded that all of God's promises are fulfilled in him!

There's also something about Mary; something we want to emulate! After Mary saw the risen Jesus, she immediately went and told the disciples, ***"I have seen the Lord!"*** Because she knew Jesus was alive, she couldn't keep that greatest news to herself. She had to tell others. Can we be like Mary in that? As Christians, we might feel excited and motivated to invite people to come to church on Easter and hear the good news of our risen Savior. And we should!

But now that you've heard again the good news of Easter, why stop at Easter? The good news of a resurrected Savior who dries tears and removes fears doesn't end when you leave here today. And there are thousands of other Marys out there who need to hear Jesus say their name! That's why I want to invite and encourage you to come back next Sunday, and then the next 5 Sundays. In both worship and Bible Study, we'll be focusing on **Joining Jesus on His Mission**, encouraging and equipping us to each see ourselves as everyday missionaries in our everyday lives-- like Mary did!

Dear fellow Mary Magdalenes, so easily caught up in fears and tears-- he lives! May that truth of the resurrection that dried Mary's tears and drove away her fears fill your hearts with that same peace and hope, today and every day! There's something about Mary—because there's something about Jesus. He Lives!