

Hespeler, 21 April 2019 © Scott McAndless – Easter

Isaiah 65:17-25, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, John 20:1-18

Sometimes it can happen to any of us – we get caught in a story that we are telling to ourselves. It is a story that may not be true but because we keep telling it to ourselves, it takes us in a spiral of deeper and deeper despair. That was what Mary was doing and it took one word – just one word – to change everything for her.

Mary had gone out to the tomb, the place where they had laid him, as soon as she could early in the morning. The sun was barely coming over the horizon when she arrived there. And her heart was only fixed on one thing. Her Lord, the only one who had ever given her reason to hope, was dead. She had come to weep and to mourn. She just wanted to throw her arms one last time around the body of the man who had meant everything to her, just to say goodbye, to say that she wished she could have done something to save him. It wouldn't have really made anything better, of course, but at least she could have gotten some closure.

But it seemed, as she drew near, that even the solace of grief was to be denied her. The stone was rolled away, the tomb apparently empty. There was no body to grieve over. The one word that would help her on this day was not the word grief.

She fled, distraught, looking for someone, anyone to help her makes sense of what was going on. She fled to the men, the disciples who were cowering in fear someplace with her disturbing news, **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”**

Immediately Simon Peter jumped up and mansplained the situation to her, “Don't you worry your pretty little head, Mary. I'll sort this out and make everything alright.” And he ran out to the tomb and another one of the men followed quickly after. Mary followed them slowly, not running as swiftly as they for she felt no great rush to return to the site of her terrible loss. But she could see the men as they turned what should have been an inquiry into a competition.

They were having a race. One sprinted ahead and then the other overtook him. Each one was clearly trying to get to the tomb first. She could just imagine how they would report it to the others later. “I was the first one to get to the tomb,” one would say, completely ignoring the fact that Mary had been the first, of course. “And then the other would protest and say, “well, maybe you got there first but I was the first one who was brave enough to go inside.” And then the other would answer, “Well, I'll grant that you were the first one to barge in and mess everything up, but I was the first



one to believe and doesn't that count for more?" And then they would spend the next few decades arguing with each other over who was more faithful to his memory and who was most qualified to lead.

By the time that Mary arrived at the tomb again, the two men were heading away, still arguing together. She had to admit that they had really been no help. It was quite clear that the one word that would change everything for her on this day was not the word *authority* or *leadership*. Theirs had been no help. She was left feeling totally abandoned. She dissolved into tears, weeping and wailing aloud as she had never done in her life. This day was just getting worse and worse.

As Mary wept, she leaned over and looked into the still-empty tomb, it was no longer exactly as empty as she remembered. Two men were there, sitting where the body had been laid. But were they men? Their clothing was so bright; Mary wasn't sure she could trust her eyes, especially when they were so filled with tears. It probably didn't matter what they were though, because they didn't give her any useful information anyways, just asked her why she was crying. And Mary was still stuck in the story she had been telling herself all morning – the story of what she had come looking for: **“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”** So clearly, the word *vision* or the word *angel* was not to be the word that would change anything.

But here is the truly amazing thing: what happened next didn't help her either. And what happened next was actual visual proof.

What would it take for you to believe – to say that it was absolutely true beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus rose from the dead? Most people would say, I suspect, that it would take the risen Jesus standing right there in front of you. Well, Mary got that. She turned around and Jesus was standing right there.

But, with Jesus standing right there, Mary was still stuck on the same story she had been telling herself all morning – that the body had been stolen and she was simply being denied her grief. **“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away,”** she said to the supposed gardener.

Now people have puzzled over this one for centuries. How was it possible that Mary could have failed to recognize this man that she had followed all over Galilee for months if not years? Had Jesus' appearance has somehow been changed as a result of the resurrection? Was Mary blinded by her tears? There might be some truth to both of those ideas, but the bottom line, I think, is something else.

I think we're being taught something important about the resurrection. It it's not something that anyone is going to prove to you simply with evidence. If somebody comes back from the dead, you will find a reason not to believe it.

You might think, and I myself might have once thought, that it was my job to get up here and convince you with logic and reason and evidence that about

2,000 years ago a Jewish man from Nazareth rose from the dead and that that changes everything, but I have come to believe that testimony and evidence will never do that for you. The word that changes everything is not *proof*.

What was the one thing, then, that changed everything for Mary? It was just one word. And that word, you've guessed it by now, was *Mary*. It wasn't that the risen Jesus had spoken to her. He had already spoken to her at that point, had asked her why she was weeping. That expression of human concern was important, but it wasn't what changed everything. The change came when Jesus connected to her and her alone. It was personal and private. It was her name.

My friends, this is the one thing that I want you to understand on this Easter day. The resurrection of Jesus is not merely an historical event. I mean, yes, it happened at a particular moment in history. If you had been there you would have experienced something extraordinary.

But to grasp that part of it is only to grasp the smallest part. The resurrection of Jesus is something that becomes true when it happens to you. When the risen Jesus looks you in the eye and calls you by name – calls out Mary or Peter, Paul or Helen. You are who he rose for. You are the one he suffered it all for. He wants you to know it, not merely with your brain but rather with everything that you are. That changes everything.