

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Second Sunday after Easter, April 18, 2010**

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Hymns:201, 208:1-3, 202, 207:1-4, 207:5-6.

Lessons: Lamentations 3: 18-26, 1 Peter 2: 11-20, John 10: 11-18.

Text: John 20:1-18

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Except for Jesus Christ, Mary Magdalene is the central person in our sermon text today. But when we talk about Mary Magdalene in a sermon, we must be careful to say no more than Scripture says. Much fiction has been created about her and much tradition has grown up about her. Fictitious, heretical writings claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, but Scripture tells us no such thing.

Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic traditions have some different views about women called “Mary” in the scriptures. Those churches also have different traditions about what happened to Mary Magdalene after Scripture says no more about her. One tradition has her remains preserved in a church in France.

Today we look at

**MARY MAGDALENE’S ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN JESUS**

- 1. She was weeping at the tomb because she thought her Lord’s body had been taken.**
- 2. Jesus appears to her and speaks to comfort her fears.**

Who was Mary Magdalene? The Bible tells us simply that Jesus had driven seven evil spirits from her (Mark 16:9). She and several other women also followed him and helped support his ministry out of their own means (Luke 8:3). Matthew speaks of Mary Magdalene by name only after the resurrection. Mark speaks of her present and watching at Jesus’ crucifixion. Luke mentions her earlier and includes her in mentioning “*some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out.*” Luke 8:2. John makes it clear she was present at the crucifixion and tells us a great deal about her presence at the empty tomb. Satan had bound her, but Jesus set her free. The mercy of Jesus was enough motivation for her to give up her life and follow him.

*“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.”*

Peter and John came to look at the empty tomb and scripture says “*(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes.*”

Mary trailed behind and lingered at the tomb. As she stood weeping in front of the tomb, she still didn't think that Jesus had risen from the dead. When she looked into the tomb, she saw something that wasn't there for John and Peter to see. Two angels dressed in white were there, one at the head and one at the foot of where Jesus' body had lain.

In her weeping she didn't catch on to the significance of angels' presence as they asked her why she was crying. It is as if she didn't even really look at them. We read: "**Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"**"

She answered "**They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."** She didn't see what she expected. Sometimes God shows us things that we don't recognize as God's answers. One could think of St. Paul asking that the Lord remove his thorn in the flesh, whatever it may have been, and God didn't. Instead Paul was reminded throughout his life that God was really in charge and in control but maybe not in the way he expected. So it is with us. Sometimes our illnesses have us baffled and maybe even angry at God that he isn't answering our prayers. But maybe he is telling us something different than we expect.

Then "**she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.**" We wonder why she didn't recognize him. Scripture doesn't tell us, either, other than that she thought he was the gardener who kept up the grave site. We also know that after the resurrection, others of Jesus' followers didn't recognize him immediately.

Like the angels, Jesus asked Mary why she was crying and added "**Who is it you are looking for?**" Her reply shows that she was ready to do whatever she could to recover the body of Jesus. "**Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'**" There is nothing she – and the others – would have liked more than to have Jesus back just as he had been. Remember, they didn't completely understand what had happened and exactly why everything that had happened in the last five days had really happened.

We know that it was all part of God's grand plan to redeem all mankind from their sins. We have the whole picture, in the written Word of God, and can read it any time. We can read any part of it and be reminded of how it all fits together. We have the divinely inspired written word of God to clarify for us what God has done for us. He loved all of sinful mankind so much that he had his only-begotten son murdered on the cross so that he could pay for all sins of all men. Then that son rose from the dead to prove that our sins are paid for, and that the devil has no power over those who believe in Jesus as their personal savior.

And here we see Jesus ministering personally to the needs of this one believer who was so blinded – perhaps both literally by her tears, and spiritually by her unbelief – that she couldn't see that Jesus still cared for her and wanted only the best for her.

But one word reaches her: "**Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher).**" He says one word! He speaks her name.

When we think of the power of one word, we are reminded of the words of Martin Luther's great Reformation hymn: "Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him." As a child I wondered what that one little word was. The plainest explanation is "It is God's Word", a Word of God. We also think of hymn 364 which talks about just one word: the name "Jesus". "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer's ear! It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, And drives away his fear."

That one word – Jesus calling her name – also makes us think of the fact that God knows each of us by name. In John chapter 10 Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd, and the shepherd who calls each of his sheep by name.

In the same way Jesus reaches out to each of us today. His gospel invitation is personal. When we recognize what it means for us, it's as if he has spoken our name, and we look into the face of our risen Savior.

She then called out recognizing him: "**Rabboni!**" Master! Teacher! My master! My teacher! This was a term of deep respect and honor.

But Jesus has a word of warning for her. She surely hoped that her master would no longer leave her, that he would always be physically with her. But it was not to be so. He must ascend into heaven to sit at the right hand of his father. "**Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"**" She was not to grasp him and hold on to him but she was to let him go. The King James Version uses the words "**touch me not**". "**Jesus saith unto her, 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, 'I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.'"**" John 20:17. But the word is not simply a touching (put out your pointer finger as if to touch) but a grasping, a hanging on to, a clinging. It is often used of Jesus touching people to heal them. Jesus touching people to heal them may have been a simple touch but contained so much more than simply reaching out and touching, as a child touches something new and different. It is a "holding on to". And Mary was not to grasp him and hold on too him as if his body were the important thing.

When Jesus spoke her name in love, she knew who this was. She turned to reach for him-to hold him and never let go. Jesus said, "**Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'**" What do these words mean? Again, she wanted to cling to him so that she would never lose him again. But Jesus said, in effect, "Mary, you don't have to hold on to me. I am ascending to my Father and I will NEVER leave you!"

So many people are enthralled by being able to touch something important, or something that belonged to a celebrity. Museums are filled with such things. Even religious things, often called "relics", are important to some people. We mentioned that the remains, the relics, of Mary Magdalene herself are supposed to be preserved in a church in France, as if the supposed remaining bones of such a person are important. Mary was to realize that Jesus had to ascend into heaven. That was the message Mary was to tell the believing brothers of Jesus, those we would call "brothers in Christ" that he would not remain on earth forever, even though he would now live forever.

And so Scripture tells us that "**Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.**"

On that Easter morning, Mary had seen the stone rolled away and immediately ran back to tell the disciples. She imagined the worst, thinking that somebody stole Jesus' body. But that was not the case. He had truly risen from the dead. He appeared to her but made it clear that he had to ascend to his Father in heaven, just as all who believe in him will do on the last day. And it is ultimately his Words that led her to go and tell others about him. May Jesus' words be the motivation as well as the source of all our telling others about our Lord and Savior. He has truly risen from the dead. Thanks be to God! Amen.