

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
April 4, 2010
Easter Day**

John 20:11-18

**An Easter Lesson from Mary Magdalene:
DRY YOUR TEARS**

- 1. An appropriate message for today**
- 2. A comforting message forever**

**Hymns: "The Lamb" – 157 – 265 – 152 –
145 – 166**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

John 20:11-18 –

Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 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.'"

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.

It happened when one of our twin girls was about two. She was walking in the church Fellowship Hall. She was just a bit taller than the level of the tables. She was just walking along – not misbehaving, not running away, not messing around – and she walked right into a table top! The table hit her right above one of her eyes.

Ouch! I went over to her and she was crying profusely. It really hurt. I took her in my arms and tried to comfort her.

Have you ever had a time you were trying to console someone who was crying? A child that you wanted to just hug and take away their pain? A child whose tears you wanted to wipe away with your fingers, and tell them, "It's OK. Stop crying. Things are going to be alright." Our hearts go out to little children at times like that.

I think Jesus felt that way on the first Easter Sunday. One of his own, Mary Magdalene, was weeping. In our reading he comes to her to tell her that things are going to be alright. As we continue the sermon series we used for Lent called "*Women in Salvation's Story*," this Easter Sunday we look at one final woman in this series, Mary Magdalene, who was at the tomb of Jesus. We learn a lesson from her and from Jesus: DRY YOUR TEARS. We've seen in the past weeks of Lent many reasons why we weep. Today on Easter, let's learn how our tears of Lent and Good Friday can be dried!

As we're encouraged to dry our tears today, we see from the reading before us that this is:

- 1. An appropriate message for today**
- 2. A comforting message forever**

1 – It might be good to briefly review who Mary Magdalene was and how she had come to know Jesus. Luke 8 tells us, "*Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*"

Scripture tells us she had previously been possessed by seven demons, and that Jesus had cast these demons out. Mary had then become a follower of Jesus, and went where he went,

following with other women that are mentioned in Scripture. She and other women cared for Jesus' needs and supported him out of their own means.

However, the ministry of Jesus had taken a tragic turn that she did not understand, as did many of his followers:

- He had come to Jerusalem at a dangerous time, with enemies plotting against his life.
- He had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- He had been put on trial before the Jewish religious council.
- He had been sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate.
- He had been beaten and crucified.
- He was buried in a tomb in a garden. A guard had been placed at the tomb, and Pilate had the tomb sealed.

Then Mary and the other women waited through the Saturday Sabbath to come finish the job of anointing Jesus' body properly for burial.

Strange things began occurring. As Mary Magdalene and the other women came to the tomb that first Easter morning, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Instead of the lifeless body of Jesus, they found two angels who told them that he had risen! Mary had gone immediately to tell the disciples this news. Peter and John came running out to the tomb to see for themselves, and they saw the empty grave clothes lying there. They went away, but Mary returned to the tomb and remained outside weeping. Her grief is evident. She doesn't know what is going on. **Her grief, however, is quite inappropriate for this day!**

Have you ever been at a gathering when you came in something inappropriate? Maybe it was a black tie dinner and you came in a golf shirt? Or a casual wedding reception, and you left your suit or your dress on – and nobody else did? Maybe it was a pool party, and you thought you didn't want to come in poolside clothes – but everyone else did!

When Mary stood there crying, the first question from both the angels and Jesus is, "Why are you crying?" This is not a day for tears! It's not a day for tears for two reasons. The first one is simple enough – It's because Jesus is alive! Mary, don't you remember the prediction? Don't you remember what Jesus said previously? Mark 8 tells us: "*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. "He spoke plainly about this."*" He clearly predicted he would rise!

The other reason her grief is not appropriate is shown us in some hints from Jesus' words. He tells Mary she should take a message to his "brothers." His brothers? The disciples that deserted him and fled are his brothers? Did you know that this is the first time that Jesus refers to his disciples as his "brothers?" How can he say this? And Jesus also tells her to deliver the message that he is returning to his Father and their Father in heaven. He also reveals that it is now time for him to be returning to the Father. What does this all mean?

It means that Jesus' work of redeeming and saving Mary had been completed. By nature, the disciples and Mary were not brothers and sisters of Jesus. By nature, they were not children of the heavenly Father. Sin had separated them from God! They needed a Savior to get "right" with him! Now that Jesus had taken their sin and the sin of the world to the cross and paid for it in full, they were his brothers and sister spiritually. This truth is only possible because of Easter, because Jesus rose victoriously over sin and death! God was now their heavenly Father. **The second reason it was appropriate for Mary to dry her tears that morning is that salvation had been won by Jesus!**

This appropriate message that Mary should dry her tears still applies to your faith and mine today. This is not a day for crying! Why not? Is it not a day for crying because:

- It's a church tradition that Easter worship is festive?

- Easter means that spring is just around the corner?
- We have the chance to wear a special Easter outfit to worship today?
- Family gatherings are planned for today?
- The kids can look forward to an Easter basket or finding some eggs?

The reason this is an appropriate day for drying the tears of Lent is because:

- **Jesus lives!**
- **Salvation is won!**

Just as Romans 4 tells us: “*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*” This is the meaning for us today! Jesus’ victory!

2 – Today we learn one other lesson from Mary Magdalene. Not only do we learn that is appropriate to dry our tears in this life because of Easter. We also see that this shall be our greatest comfort beyond this Easter, in future days.

Look at Mary’s comfort today! How comforted did she feel when she recognized Jesus? So comforted that she wanted grasp him and hold on to him! Jesus even has to tell her, “Don’t keep on holding on to me!” You might wonder why he said that. He doesn’t give the specific reason why, but we can speculate:

- For one reason, it wasn’t necessary for her to hold on to him out of fear for losing him again. Jesus wasn’t going to be snatched away by enemies again.
- Also, Jesus tells her that he is going back to his Father. She can’t think that the old familiar daily life of him and his followers is going to continue the way it had. He is being glorified now for his saving work on earth. And he will be soon glorified in returning to his heavenly home with his Father.

Mary showed her comfort in another way. When Jesus told her to deliver a message to his disciples, she was more than eager to share the news. She was eager to tell them, for they needed this comforting message too. All those disciples had deserted him and fled in the Garden of Gethsemane. And among them, Peter had denied he knew Jesus three times. What comfort could be theirs knowing that they could dry their tears and rejoice in the risen Savior! (Unfortunately, however, we hear in the Gospel of Mark that when Mary brought this news, they didn’t believe it. Comfort would be a while in coming yet!)

Do you need comforting at times in your life? At what times?

This comfort sets the tone for our outlook on life. Could you be characterized as a sorrowful, pessimistic, crabby person with a dark outlook on life? Or as joyful, positive, and optimistic? Perhaps there may be a day we feel burdened down by a problem or a sin. Perhaps the temptation might exist to be a predominantly sorrowful, crabby, pessimistic person. But don’t let your sorrow prevent you from hearing or understanding his voice when he asks you, “Why are you crying?” Don’t let your teary eyes fail to see the promises God has for us. For he has given us a reason to have joy in our life.

Perhaps we will need that comfort at a time of guilt. Guilt can be a terrible thing. Recently in the news there was an interesting story about a former student in Colorado who felt guilt. Principal Mark Strackbein of Eagle Valley High School in Gypsum, CO, received a one-page letter from a 65-year-old grandmother. In the letter she admitted that she and a friend stole the answers to a Shakespeare test in the fall of 1957. In the letter she said, “**Conscience never lets you forget. . . I felt I still needed to confess to the school.**” Guilt! When we feel guilt over our sins, remember those words from Romans: “*(Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.*”

Another time of life when we need comforting is in our troubles. Many in this world are having current troubles – earthquake victims, soldiers in Iraq. But troubles come near to us also.

- Perhaps unemployment and bankruptcy loom.
- Maybe it's sickness that is our ailment.
- Perhaps it's adversity from a neighbor or co-worker.
- Or betrayal by a former friend or a relative.
- Or your boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with you.
- Maybe you'll get cut from the sports team or the music program.

When troubles come, remember the comfort that we have because of the first Easter day, and think of the confidence Paul wrote of in Romans 8: *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."*

Perhaps we need comfort from grief. I know there are people in our congregation who need this even today on Easter. We have recently prayed for congregational families who have had loved ones die recently. Death does not take a holiday. But comfort comes through the Easter message and from the Savior who said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*

Or it may be our own death that we are facing and need comfort from. Where will your comfort be?

- If you're all about your job, maybe your comfort will come from calling up your boss and talking to him.
- If you're all about money, maybe you could call your bank and talk to a bank representative.
- If you're all about traveling, maybe you could talk to your travel agent.
- If you're all about sports, maybe you could watch SportsCenter.

But if the love and joy for our Savior is what you're about, take comfort in the message we have this Easter day, and say along with King David in Psalm 23, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no*

evil. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Mary Magdalene teaches us much today. **DRY YOUR TEARS!** The tears of Lent over our sins are to be dried this morning.

- 1. What an appropriate message this is for today**
- 2. What a comforting message this is for our future**

May we also remember that one day, because of that Savior, we will have our tears dried perfectly forever. Just as John hears in Revelation, a voice says, *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

God help us to look forward to that day, because of what we have seen and heard today! And may he keep us firm in the faith and close to his heart until the day we join Him there! Amen.