

4.17.2022 Easter Day (Colossians 3:1-4, John 20:1-16)

It was Charlie Brown that said, “Sometimes I lay awake at night thinking where did I go wrong, then I hear a voice say... ‘This is going to take more than one night.’” Perhaps we should add his thought to the list of reasons why Lent spans not one, but 40 days and 40 nights. Lent is a difficult season filled with sacrifice and the kind of honest, self-examination that takes more than one night to accomplish. Our journey through Lent wasn’t easy, but we walked that path with our Lord, and in doing so we learned so much about where we’ve gone wrong.

It is difficult to confront sin and failure, but as we learned two weeks ago, “*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). It is uncomfortable to take up our own cross, but Jesus said, “*Whoever does not carry their own cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple*” (Luke 14:27). It breaks our heart to walk every agonizingly painful step with our Lord on the Way of the Cross, but Holy Scripture assures us, “*Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy*” (Psalm 126:5).

On this Easter Day we reap in joy, for we are a people who, in the words of St. Paul, “*share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory*” (Romans 8:17). Easter Day is a celebration of our Lord’s glorious Resurrection, and a time to *share in His glory*. In our Epistle this morning we’re reminded that while Jesus was the first Person to rise on Easter Day, He wasn’t the only one. St. Paul tells Christians, “*Therefore, since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*” (Colossians 3:1-3).

In other words, when our Savior died on the Cross, you died with Him. You were “*crucified with Christ*” (Galatians 2:20), and when He rose in victory, you rose with Him, and now you “*share in His glory.*” *Therefore*, writes St.

Paul, “*since you have been raised with Christ,*” live and act like resurrected people, “*strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God,*” because the war is won. Death is dead. Our victorious King has conquered our greatest adversary, and that fact, the truth that our Lord’s resurrection has been accomplished is the key, and the guide, and the only way to live the “*abundant*” life (John 10:10) in a difficult world filled with “*many trials and sorrows*” (John 16:33).

In our Gospel reading this morning, we see an example of how hard life can be if we forget, or simply fail to understand the victory we have in, with, and through our Risen Lord. Today we read about Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb “*when it was yet dark*” (John 20:1), and as we examine this account, we recognize a type of darkness overshadowing her as well. Mary had come to the tomb with sweet spices to anoint Christ’s dead body, for Jesus had been killed. As we say in the Creed, our Lord was “*crucified, dead, and buried.*”

Mary was weeping and mourning because all the good He had accomplished, all His work of loving and healing had been brought to a brutal end. The dark angel of death, just like it had for so many before Him, appeared to have put an end to Jesus. Mary grieved His death, and the fact that His body was not in the tomb when she arrived only made the moment more sorrowful. Wasn’t death enough? Now someone had taken His body. As Mary remains at the tomb and continues to grieve, the fact that Jesus plainly foretold He would rise on the third day never seems to cross her mind (Mark 8:31, Matthew 17:22, Luke 9:22). Jesus’ words of life should consume her every thought, but darkness and death are casting a shadow over the words of her Lord.

As the passage continues we’re told that Mary’s grieving was interrupted. When she stooped down and looked into the tomb, “*... she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him*” (John 20:12-13). You would think seeing “*two angels in white*” sitting in the

empty tomb would remind Mary of Jesus' words about His resurrection, but in her state of mind, Mary is in the presence of angels without realizing it (Hebrews 13:2). She is so focused on "*earthly things*," that she speaks to angels as though she is speaking to ordinary men. "*They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.*" Mary Magdalene comes face to face with white-robed angels that wonder why she would be weeping at a time like this, but she finds no hope, and no peace, even in their presence, and turns back again to darkness and sorrow.

When she turned herself back, the Scripture tells us she "*saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away*" (John 20:14-15). Now, why would Mary suppose Jesus to be the gardener? She traveled with Him as one of His closest followers, and is named at least 12 times in the four Gospels, more often than many of the Apostles. She was chosen by God to be the first person to see the Risen Christ, to announce His Resurrection to the Apostles, and is referred to in early Christian writings as "the Apostle to the Apostles" (St. Hippolytus), yet trapped in darkness and the shadow of death, she failed to recognize her Lord.

Mary was so burdened, so weighed down by death, she couldn't see life as *Life* stood right in front of her (John 1:4; 14:6). She was so focused on herself, her own sorrow, and "*earthly things*" that it became impossible for her to set her affection on things above. He is risen, the Lord is risen indeed, but from Mary's earthly perspective all she could see and all she could say was: "*They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.*"

When we, like Mary, view the events of our lives from an earthly perspective, we will always fail to see the things of heaven, even when they're right in front of us. This is the reason St. Paul tells Christians to "*set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Colossians 3:2).

Every moment of the faithful Christian life depends entirely on the historical reality that Christ is Risen. If the resurrection is not a daily reality to us, and if we don't recognize or understand that we "*have been raised with Christ,*" we're going to end up stuck standing on the outside looking in.

When we read this account it's easy to see this is the position in which Mary finds herself. She is stuck on the outside, trapped in sorrow and suffering, yet even there, and perhaps especially there, God in the person of Jesus Christ is with her. Mary supposes Jesus to be the gardener, but in the next verse our Lord says one word to her that changes her perspective completely. Jesus said, "*Mary,*" and immediately she recognized Him. Jesus, the Good Shepherd "*calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out*" (John 10:3). So often we fix our hearts and minds on "*earthly things,*" we fail to hear or see the clear and evident truth, but by the grace of God, Jesus meets us where we are, *calls us by name,* and *leads us out* of the valley.

Jesus called Mary by name. He spoke to her personally, because that's the nature of God. We meet together as a congregation in His house to pray, to give thanks, to worship, but God isn't going to call us as a church. He's going to call each of us by name, because God is the God of the individual. Everyone who comes to Jesus, comes alone. Jesus met Nicodemus alone at night, a Samaritan woman alone at a well, He told Zacchaeus to come down from that tree, and St. Matthew to rise and follow Me. Remember, we are each the one that the Good Shepherd left the ninety-nine to find.

Charlie Brown's words about lying awake wondering where did I go wrong, are words we can all relate to. We've been there, and a god that is a god only to the multitudes is no help at all in those times. In that silence we need the One, True God who formed us in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), who redeemed us on the Cross (Galatians 3:13), who calls us by name (John 10:3). We need the Good Shepherd, who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, and who, when we reach the other side, anoints our injured bodies and fills our cup until it runs over (Psalm 23).

We came here this morning to celebrate our Lord's Resurrection, and discovered, Jesus wasn't the only one to rise on Easter Day. Holy Scripture proclaims the truth that we *have been raised with Christ*. We share in the glory of the Risen Lord who calls us by name. By the grace of God, may that reality be our source of peace as we strive to live and act like resurrected people, setting our affection on things above, and building His kingdom here below.