

Easter Sunday Sunrise

March 27, 2016

Prayer of the Day: O God, you made the dawn of this most holy day shine with the glory of our Lord's resurrection. Grant that we who have been raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Alleluia!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. Alleluia! (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Sermon Text: John 20:17-18

It had been three long days. Friday afternoon to Sabbath Saturday to now—the dawning hours of Sunday. John tells us that early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene pops out of her house and briskly walks to the cemetery. This is not any ordinary visit. No, someone she loved recently died. Now she goes out to a scene she had never hoped to see. What do you think was going through her mind as she raced to the tomb?

Were you wondering that as you followed along in John 20? Did you step into her shoes, look through her eyes, ponder what thoughts must have pounded in her heart?

Do you think she is reliving better times with Jesus? At one time, seven demons tormented Mary's body ([Luke 8:2](#)). Yet, Jesus came and forever drove them out. After that, he did not leave her life; she continued following him, listening to his sweet voice point her eyes up to heaven. He preached that he alone is the Way into heaven ([John 14:6](#)). Only a bridge can take you over a river. Jesus is the only bridge that can take you into heaven. She found peace in knowing that he had come to completely save her.

Do you think Good Friday is replaying over and over again in her mind? She stood at the base of the cross and stared at her black-and-blue-bruised Savior hanging. Red blood trickled from his head, his hands, and his feet. Screams pierced her ears and soul. Jesus' cries for his Father to answer him are still so fresh. Those words: "It is finished!" just stick to her. Then she watches as his chest no longer sucks in oxygen. Do you think her mind reruns the final hours she spent with Jesus?

Do you think she is focused on what she must do now? The morning sun peeks over the horizon. She has been waiting all weekend to visit the gravesite. Her hands hold a

John 20:17-18

¹⁷ 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.'"

¹⁸ 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.

mixture of spices and perfume to tuck into the burial cloths. Jesus' body would already smell like rotting flesh. These fragrant spices would stifle the smell so that the tomb can be reused later. This final preparation would be her chance to pay her final respects.

If you ever found yourself staring at death, you probably can understand what thoughts raced through Mary's head. You think about the good memories you had. You relive the final moments. You consider how your life will change. Out of all the thoughts racing through Mary's mind is the undeniable truth: Jesus died. Gone. Removed. Separated—and he does not appear ever to be coming back.

You wonder if Mary was just as much shaken at losing Jesus, as she was shaken knowing that death still separated her from God. The Bible makes it crystal clear where death comes from: *The soul who sins is the one who will die* ([Ezekiel 18:4](#)). With the very presence of sin clinging to us, what is there to look forward to? Isaiah writes: "*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear*" ([59:2](#)). How terrifying is that?! That because you and I have sinned and ignored the commands of a holy God, that he does not look at us! That he does not turn a compassionate eye or loving heart! That you expect to be caught red-handed by him!

God cannot stand to look at the shame hiding in our hearts. The actions which demonstrate little care for your fellowman. The words spoken which were clearly meant to hurt. The thoughts too disgusting to mention in public. If sins are not dealt with, then Mary only had eternal separation to look forward. If our sins were not dealt with, then our relationship with God is over.

In between the sobbing, the racing thoughts, the sheer despair, you hear it. One gentle word. "Mary." Immediately she turns and melts into the arms of her Savior. What joy in a place where very little joy is found! What comfort to know that death did not swallow Jesus up! What an even greater assurance to know that Jesus is not separated from you! **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.'**"

EASTER RESTORES RELATIONSHIPS! No longer does God hide his face from you. Because Jesus lives, he turns his face to you! He has heard your cry for help! God piles up every careless action, every hurtful word, every shameful thought on Jesus. Then the Father turns his face from him. For three hours on the cross Jesus cries out in agony only to hear no response. His Father abandons Jesus. He literally turns his back on him. He treats him as sin deserves. He Jesus bear all this in your place.

As you stand beside Peter and John and peer into the tomb, you see the definite proof that God has restored his relationship with you! You do not see a body lying on a platform. No face cloth holds the outline of a nose, eyes, cheek bones, and round face. Those linens are folded up, off to the side. The body of Jesus has regained life! God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus lives because he gave God the perfection God demanded. Jesus lives in order to clothe you with his perfection! That means *[Your] sins and lawless acts [God] remembers no more* ([Hebrews 10:17](#)).

EASTER RESTORES RELATIONSHIPS! You hear Jesus himself say that. He calls you “brothers” and “sisters.” He describes closeness— more than just neighbors or friends. You belong in the family of God. Because you are part of God’s family, it means that you share in the same inheritance in which Jesus lives now. Jesus tells Mary that he would soon leave to the Father. He does. On Ascension Day Jesus rises into heaven. Not to run away from you. Rather, to prepare heaven so that you can live there ([John 14:2-3](#)). Because Jesus lives, you will live forever!

Jesus calls God your “Father.” Earthly fathers can pick out their child in a crowd of children. They protect them; they give them what they need at the right time. Unlike imperfect earthly fathers, your perfect Father never makes poor choices, never neglects his children, never acts in selfishness. Your Father in heaven picks out you on earth. Your Father does not remain cold and distant— far away from his believing children. He remains near to you. His ears remain open to hear your pleas. His mind knows what is best for you.

Jesus says that God is your God. You can approach him with confidence. You do not fear that God is going to damn you to hell. You do not tremble if you do not say the right words as you stand in his presence. No, God Almighty is your God. He holds mighty power in heaven and on earth uses that power to control all things for your good. It means that nothing will catch him by surprise. It means that he will not stand by powerless, unable to act. The One who sits on heaven’s throne will never be too busy to talk to you personally, to hear your requests, or answer them.

Your God invites you to come and talk him. He is not swamped with prayers and pleas. He is never too busy to deal with you. He does not only handle your “big” problems and shrug off the “little” problems. He does not put you “on hold” and tell you that you are the “-nth” person in line. He listens to every believer; he listens to you. So, pour out your prayers to God. Know that he hears them and he answers them in his perfect way.

Your Father, your God continues walking with you in life— even in you must see death. You may have to stare at a familiar gravesite. You might remember joyful times or the final moments with them or how life is different without them. Your Savior who lives to comfort you eternally is the same Savior who lives to comfort you now. Those who die trusting in Jesus as their Savior live in the full relationship with him. Jesus points out that he lives. Because he lives, every believer will live eternally. Because he lives, you will live.

That is the powerful promise Mary takes hold of. She **went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.** Jesus is not in his tomb. He has come back to life! He lives! The living Jesus Mary saw is who you will see. Because Jesus lives, you will see him with your own eyes. Because of Jesus’ perfect life, your Father will raise you into the inheritance stored up for you. **EASTER HAS RESTORED RELATIONSHIPS.**

What do you think was going through Mary’s mind as she raced to the tomb? She might have relived better times with Jesus. Maybe she thought about Good Friday. Maybe

she wondered how life was going to change. In just the twinkling of an eye, life did change. Fears vanish the moment she sees Jesus.

You see that same Jesus this morning. Fears about being removed, cut off, separated from God vanish. God has not turned his back on you! God does not leave you crushed under guilt. He sends Jesus to make you perfect before your Father in heaven. No longer does death bring final separation. No, death is conquered. **EASTER RESTORES RELATIONSHIPS!** God is your Father. God is your God. Thanks and praise be to him forever and ever!