

## **“Good News and the Resurrection Go Together”**

**John 20:1-18**

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Frankfort, Kentucky

April 1, 2018

**Easter**

When the first rays of sunshine broke through the night sky, Mary Magdalene wanted to be at the tomb. This is why she left home while it was still dark, which was as much a reflection of her spirit as the time of day.

I have to wonder if she even went to bed that night. If she did, I doubt she slept much. It is hard to sleep when your heart is broken.

Perhaps she thought she would find some comfort just sitting outside the tomb where Jesus was buried on Friday. At the very least, this quiet and peaceful place would give her some time to reflect on how good Jesus had been to her and the difference he made in her life.

Little did Mary know this day would be filled with surprises and interruptions much like the previous ones. Nothing she planned for this Sunday was going to occur, but looking back, I don't believe Mary would have changed anything.

Listen as I share highlights from Mary's early visit to Jesus' burial site. We'll look through the lens the fourth gospel provides.

When Mary arrived at the tomb just before the sun came up, she was surprised to discover the stone at the entrance had been rolled away. To her dismay, Jesus' body was missing, which broke her heart even more.

It appears she believed his body had been stolen by thieves or moved by the authorities, which led her to wonder how anyone could be so insensitive and cruel. Hadn't Jesus' enemies done enough to this innocent man she loved so dearly? Would this nightmare never end? Yes, it would, but not the way she could have ever imagined.

Looking at that empty tomb, Mary did the only thing she knew to do. She ran to tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciple what she had discovered. Immediately, they ran to the tomb to find things as she described. Without any answers they returned home, but Mary lingered at the tomb.

As Mary stood weeping outside the empty tomb, she had an encounter with two angels and then a man whom she thought to be the gardener. Instead of providing answers for Mary, all three asked her why she was weeping. She replied by telling them she was disturbed because someone had taken the body of her Lord, and she volunteered to retrieve his body if she was told where to go.

As it turned out, she did not need to go anywhere. The one she was seeking was standing beside her, and she recognized him once he spoke her name.

"Mary," Jesus said, probably using the same tone and inflection he had on many occasions. When Mary heard that familiar voice mention her name, she turned toward Jesus out of disbelief and cried out the word for teacher, "Rabboni!" (John 20:16)

After they embraced, Jesus told Mary to go tell the disciples what she had experienced, which she did. "I have seen the Lord," she said to them as she told them about their encounter and conversation.

It is hard to find a more comforting and inspiring story in scripture. It speaks to everyone who has suffered loss, experienced disappointment and searched for hope. Surely, this includes all of us.

One of the most intriguing parts of this story for me occurs when Jesus calls Mary by name. Up to this point, Mary had not recognized Jesus, even when Jesus asked her who it was she was looking for and why she was crying.

That encounter and conversation did not open Mary's eyes and lead her to believe the man she was talking to outside the tomb was actually Jesus. The awareness of the gardener's true identity did not occur until Jesus gently spoke her name.

"Mary"

No one ever said her name like Jesus did. This is because no one knew her or loved her like Jesus did.

This story reinforces what I suspect you already understand about relationships. If someone knows your name, chances are they know more about you than your name. Quite often, they know much more.

This was certainly true that morning at the tomb. Jesus knew more than Mary's name. He knew things about her no one else did, and before that day was over, Mary was glad he did.

**What did Jesus know about Mary that morning at the tomb?**

**He knew Mary loved him with all her heart.** Time and again she found ways to express her gratitude for Jesus' mercy and compassion.

No one had done more to restore her sanity and self-esteem than Jesus. He rescued her from a miserable existence and made it possible for her to have a new and better life.

As a result, her love for him was immeasurable, and her appreciation for him was inexpressible. When words failed her, she showed her love through spontaneous acts of kindness.

**Jesus knew Mary was a loyal and faithful disciple.** She was one of the few people at the foot of the cross on Friday. Her courage and compassion were on full display.

When she answered the call to follow Jesus, she made a lifelong commitment. At no time did she withdraw her support after counting the cost or assessing the risks.

Even if others fearfully abandoned him, she would not. No one or nothing would ever come between Jesus and her, and they didn't.

If Jesus was the image of God, Mary of Magdala was the reflection of a true disciple. She modeled commitment and loyalty as well as anyone who answered the call to follow Jesus.

**That morning outside the tomb, Jesus knew Mary's heart was broken and her dreams were shattered.** Jesus was fully aware Mary had come to the center of her grief to bring closure to the most painful event she had witnessed and the dearest friend she had lost. Truly, her heart was crushed.

So were her hopes and dreams for a better life, and Jesus knew it. Once again, life had been squeezed out of her promising plans, which led her to the cemetery of broken dreams, a place all too familiar to her.

This time, however, Jesus was not going to let her grieve alone and leave that cemetery the way she entered it. Mary, this beloved and loyal disciple whose pure heart was filled with gratitude and sorrow, would be the first to know Jesus was alive.

Her tears would be the first he would dry. Her broken heart would be the first to be healed. Her despair would be the first to disappear. Her shattered dreams would be the first to be restored. Her voice would be the first to announce the good news of the resurrection.

And it all began with one word, Mary, spoken by the resurrected Jesus who was as grateful for her as she was for him.

**Mary's name is not the only name Jesus knows.** He knows your name, too. And he knows much more about you than just your name.

Jesus knows what has broken your heart and shattered your dreams.

He knows whose absence in your home or on this pew takes your breath away and leaves you speechless.

He knows of the doubts and disappointments that have robbed you of your joy.

He knows what battles you are waging and which ones you are struggling to overcome.

He knows the burdens you are carrying and the toll they are taking on you.

He knows what you are worried about that keeps you from sleeping at night.

He knows which relationships are fragile and how fearful you are they are going to fall apart.

He knows which temptations you don't seem to be able to resist and how guilty you feel over making poor decisions.

He knows what frustrates, upsets, angers and frightens you.

Yes, Jesus knows far more than your name. He knows the good, bad and the ugly that make you who you are, and he loves you anyway. He cares as much for you as he did Mary on Easter morning and the disciples he met with later that evening.

He has a hope-filled message for you today that is similar to the one he shared with Mary and the disciples on Resurrection Sunday. It will bring you the same comfort, joy, guidance and peace it did them.

**What is this message?** Easter is about starting over when you thought all hope was gone.

A broken heart and shattered dreams will not have the final word in your life. God will, and that word will be a good one because there is no situation in life that God cannot embrace and change for the better if you let him.

If God could reach into a sealed and guarded tomb and give life back to his crucified Son, then God can help you with any problem you are facing. You never have to settle for things as

they are and give in to despair. Always and at all times, God is working to bring good out of bad and life out of death.

As a person of faith, you will never come to the end of the road because the most distinguishing characteristic of God is God's ability to make something new. God promises to come to the cemetery of broken dreams and to lead you down new paths filled with people and opportunities that will make life hopeful again.

This is the good news the Risen Lord has for you today.

It will begin with one very familiar word—your name.

When you hear it, do what Mary did—stop, look and listen.