

This is a night of new creation, new life, and the unknown. Tonight is our first full Easter Vigil in a few years (where everyone could attend). We had an interim, then a pandemic and all the restrictions that came with it. This year, it feels as though we are emerging from chaos.

No one knew what had happened to Jesus. The characters in the Gospel do not know where to go. They must choose: should they fight or should they flee? I know that Mary Magdalene felt the chaos. I am not sure she knows what to make of the resurrection of Christ. The beloved disciple is filled with instant belief. However, almost everyone leaves the tomb.

Mary is the only person who remains.¹

The story begins with a group of women going to do something considered women's work. They must anoint this body, which could not be done the previous day because of the sabbath.

We have waited since Maundy Thursday to celebrate and find the new creation. We endured the terrible crucifixion on Good Friday.

And tonight, we encounter a witness, Mary Magdalene. She appeared at the crucifixion, and now once again at the empty tomb. She will forever be linked as the first human witness of the resurrection.

Tonight, we will expand the body of Christ with new members: with the Baptism of Caroline. This child will be a witness to the glory of Christ.

At that tomb Mary is in a terrible situation. She is alone, confused, and in tears.² She is grieving the loss of a teacher and a friend. In my mind she is grieving the loss of what could have been - and should have been - given Christ's previous teachings.

To me, Mary seems to be a woman well versed in death, given her context in the ancient near east, as a Jewish woman, she might have had different ideas.

Remember, the Sadducees were a group of Jews, who viewed resurrection differently. They thought resurrection would only happen to all people at the same time. This makes what happens next in John's gospel surprising to say the least. Jesus' resurrection is all the more shocking.

Mary receives the hint of resurrection first from the angels.

Sometimes we do not appreciate the messengers, their questions and observations might feel strange and obtrusive. Here, the translation from Greek to English misses a play of words. The word for "announcement" is related to the word for "messengers, angels." The good news is from and in the messengers of God. They might have the questions that we most need to hear.³ The messengers in this situation highlight the new creation.

Mary asks the question that I would have asked.

Where is Jesus' body? She points it out to the disciples and to the angels. She remains in the tomb in the dark. I imagine it to be much like it is outside now. We know that there is light coming, however, the evening is long and the pain feels like it won't stop.

Mary is yearning for hope. The messengers give her a hint that her tears are unnecessary. Something new might be afoot.

¹ Moore, J.J. (2022). Commentary on John 20:1-18.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/vigil-of-easter-2/commentary-on-luke-241-12-8>

² Wesley, John and Charles: *Selected prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters, and Treatises*. (1981). Paulist Press. P.84 She does not know it yet, but what she needs a "joyful resurrection."

³ Gafney, W.C. (2021). *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. New York: Church Publishing. pp.148-

Then Jesus finally calls her by name. She receives the light of Christ. We too, must seek then remain in the light of Christ.⁴

Meanwhile the male disciples chose flight. They leave the work of the burial anointing to the women, they are certainly not trying to break that social barrier.

When they hear the news of the empty tomb they run. As a runner myself, I appreciate the sentiment. However, it was not the exhilaration of running, they were not chasing the runners high, it was the curiosity that drove the disciples: Where has the body gone? Why are the clothes and linens still present?

Who took our Lord?

These questions overwhelm them and they choose to run in the other direction.

When the men arrive, they do not come to take away from the women's proclamation; rather to enhance it. They confirm the difficult assertion that Jesus is not in that tomb. Their investigation only considered that the body was there or missing. Except for the beloved disciple, they didn't consider a possibility that is far more spectacular. The resurrection and new life itself.⁵

Most people can relate to the flight of the disciples. How could someone not flee after all they had witnessed? Their doubts are understandable. The words of scripture can feel outlandish to us at times. They can feel as though they do not belong to us.⁶ Yet these words can be a constant source of new life, new beginnings, for us.

Mary speaks to the risen Lord.

A better translation for Jesus' response to her is, "Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary is not to cling to him; the time for clinging has not yet come.⁷ It is time to begin a new walk with Christ.

The gospel account shows many ways to experience Christ. Yes, Peter runs away. Yes, all of the disciples leave. However, I would point out that all of them go on to experience Hope; they experience Easter. Together they create an individual, and later corporate, relationship with what it means to have a risen savior.⁸

There is unity in this gospel passage. The women travel together. The men run back to greet Jesus together. Yet all of this unity is chaotic. It is not until the messengers of God speak that we have order again.

They angels ask an unexpected question in John 20:13, "They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'" When the chaos ends, one person begins a new relationship with the Risen Savior.⁹

Once Mary speaks to Jesus the tone of their conversation is different. Jesus does not talk of those who followed him as disciples or servants, rather he speaks of them as friends; as brothers.¹⁰

⁴ Moore, J.J. (2022). Commentary on John 20:1-18.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/vigil-of-easter-2/commentary-on-luke-241-12-8>

⁵ Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. [The sun could be shining.]

⁶ Thomas, D. (2022). <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3369>

⁷ Gafney, W.C. (2021). *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. New York: Church Publishing. pp.148-

⁸ Thomas, D. (2022). <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3369>

⁹ Gafney, W.C. (2021). *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. New York: Church Publishing. pp.148-

¹⁰ Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

His relationship with them has changed in the same way that our relationship with the newly baptized changes: we are called to serve this child in a new way, to bring them the message of Jesus' endless hope. We are called to be Caroline's friend in Christ; to be her brothers and sisters in Christ.

With each action, we fulfill our vow to help them live as a Christian loving God and their neighbor.¹¹

I hope we do not think of this Easter story as an ending or as an opportunity to run. Instead, I pray we think of it as a new beginning.¹²

With all the odds stacked against the disciples, the ending is the beginning and death has been annihilated. This is an overwhelming amount of news!

Those who were evil tried to kill Christ and ironically ended up bringing forth the means of liberation. Satan is defeated. Hope reigns true. What seems like an individual encounter leads to a new church, to new worship, and to a new understanding of God's love for us.

The beginning question asked: Where is Jesus' body?

They disciples could have imagined where that question would lead them nor how life changing the answer was than what they expected.

The Easter ending is one of hope. In the most difficult moments of conflict and distress, God calls us by name, to be and see the image of Christ at all times.¹³

Today, when we say the baptismal covenant, we recognize new life has come to us. There have been times when we have been afraid and we ran.¹⁴ Today is a new opportunity to see Christ with fresh eyes. This new relationship with Christ will be different from the one you held in the past. So when we experience shadows and pain, know that there is hope. Tonight, remember that God has new life boldly in store for us at all times. Christ is risen! Alleluia!¹⁵

¹¹ Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. My thoughts, It is sometimes a challenge to see Jesus when we seek using our own path. When someone has wronged us, for example, it is easy to say, "Lord, what am I to do with this annoying person?" Rather than looking to our baptismal vows and saying, "God, allow me to stay in the shadows until I see your light in my friend's face." Those shadows that loomed like dark rain clouds on our perfect day: those shadows are gone.

¹² Thomas, D. (2022). <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3369>

¹³ Moore, J.J. (2022). Commentary on John 20:1-18.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/vigil-of-easter-2/commentary-on-luke-241-12-8>

¹⁴ There have been times when we sought a particular answer instead of asking the deeper questions needed to guide us on the path which Christ laid out for us.

¹⁵ Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.