

Christ is risen!

Easter is a time of rejoicing. It is filled with signs of joy, things like family and the fresh blossoms of spring.

It's wonderful time. Daily, we confront conflict and endless frustrations: Our health is poor, our work is bad, a relationship is on the rocks, the car won't start, our computer refuses to cooperate, traffic is a mess, and on and on. So we savor times like this when we can forget even for a moment all of our troubles.

I remember how Jesus said to Mary at the tomb, "Do not be afraid." This morning I want to talk about forgetting our troubles and our fears, and resting in the resurrected Christ, about how this is a part of our day-to-day walk with God and with one another.

PRAYER

READ Matthew 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Mary Magdalene was the first person to visit Christ's tomb and to witness the Resurrection. Let that settle into your heart for a moment.

What was it about Mary's relationship with Jesus that drove her to His tomb before anyone else? How had she come to be so emotionally connected with Him? If we can answer these questions, I think Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid," will begin to make sense for us.

Jesus met Mary Magdalene near the beginning of His ministry when He delivered her from seven demons. Now I don't know what it's like to be possessed by seven demons, but I'm sure it is worse than a bad hair day! ("O darn, seven demons again!")

This was such a powerful event in Mary's life she stuck with Jesus as one of His most devout followers from that day forward. Jesus said earlier, **Matthew 12:43-45: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first."**

What our Lord was saying was that a person's heart is like a house, complete with furnishings. In Mary's case, the furnishings were an evil spirit. So after the spirit was cast out, the house—the person's heart—was unfurnished, and if it was not refurnished with good things, the evil spirit would return.

So Mary Magdalene didn't wait! She refurnished her heart immediately. But with what? With Jesus!

I can't even begin to imagine the pain Mary must've experienced before Jesus came into her heart. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally, she was a train wreck. She was demoralized and confused. She was broken.

But when Jesus ministered to Mary, He delivered her from the things that had created her crisis. He gave her open heart surgery, a spiritual angioplasty,

removing everything inside of her that wasn't supposed to be there, and then replacing these things with good things, with his love, joy, peace.

When I got my first job out of college I was serving as a youth minister in a church in Oregon. I lived in the basement of a church member, which cost nearly nothing, which was good, because I made nearly nothing!

My couch was a double bed on the floor with a quilt on it. I had an 11-inch black and white TV that sat on a steamer trunk, a.k.a. coffee table. That apartment was dark and sometimes damp—and a little depressing. So if I wanted to get out of the house and go for a spin, I would just jump into my good ole Ford Pinto! You're getting the picture?!

One summer a couple from my church asked me to house-sit for them for a couple of weeks. They had the house on the hill complete with pool, jacuzzi, vaulted ceilings, cable, antiques, flower gardens, and a kitchen with a nook with a view of a lake.

I quickly adapted. They even let me drive their brand new S-Series Mercedes Benz.

I hadn't done anything to make this experience what it was. I simply said yes to my church member's housesitting offer, packed my clothes, and moved from my dark, damp basement apartment into their light-filled, lavishly appointed home. And my life was instantly transformed. The sense of life in that home had a dazzling effect on my sense of well-being. It was refreshing. Even the gas station attendant treated me special, filling the Benz up before anyone else, even when there were several cars ahead of me!

I think Mary's experience was similar to mine, but better. Without contributing anything, Mary received a replacement of what was dark, dismal, and pain-filled in her heart with Jesus' **light, love, and life**. It was free. She said yes, and her life was transformed instantaneously.

Jesus had brought Mary into His life when He gave her His heart. And as she lived in the life of her Lord, she found her own life. Her emptiness had been profound, deeper than anyone of us can ever imagine. But when Jesus gave her His life, she

became full, full of love and acceptance, full of forgiveness and the assurance of salvation.

The Scriptures tell us that upon her conversion, Mary provided for Jesus and His disciples from her own means. What happened in Mary was that Jesus made her whole and then she shared what she had so that others might also have the opportunity to receive from Jesus what she had received from him. Mary's deliverance was great, and so her response was also great.

From time-to-time someone tells me they have problems but they're not important enough to share with the Man Upstairs, that they don't want to bother him.

This sounds very humble and pious, but what if Mary had felt that way? What if she had thought that she was responsible for getting her own house in order before she bothered the Man Upstairs? She probably wouldn't have been delivered for no one can deliver himself from anything. We need help ridding ourselves of our fears, our troubles, our heartaches, and our sins. We need Jesus in our hearts just as Mary did.

Jesus' death on the Cross must've been unbearable for Mary. I mean, how could she let Him go? In another account of her visit to the tomb, in the Gospel of St. John, she was weeping. The angel asked her, "why are you weeping?" And she said to them, "They have taken away MY Lord" (John 20:13).

When Jesus gave Mary His heart, all of her fears were removed. All of her troubles were wiped away. But with His death, she must've felt the emptiness encroaching again, the demons beckoning her, the shadows, the dark shadows from the valley of despair must've been rolling in on her.

So Jesus, resurrected from the dead, met Mary, and he said, "Do not be afraid!" When he said those words, he meant, "Forget your troubles, for the life that gave you life is still alive! "Forget your troubles, for the light that lit your way still shines."

Christ is risen!

Martin Luther said, those who accept the Gospel of this true life, the life of Jesus, as their own life are the Mary Magdalenes. One who desires to be where Jesus is, this is a Mary Magdalene. One who knows he or she will find Jesus in their weakness not in their strength, this is a Mary Magdalene. One who allows Jesus to be God and to take authority in their life, this is a Mary Magdalene.

Just as He did for Mary, our Lord Jesus offers to heal whatever is broken and to be our heart surgeon, giving us His heart to dwell within.

Here, in this life in Christ, there is no fear, no shame, and no regret. For our troubles have been wiped away as Christ's life becomes our own.

This is the power of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He dwells in your heart by virtue of Holy Baptism and He keeps on dwelling there. St. Paul talks about the power of Christ's resurrection in our lives when he said, **Colossians 3:1-4: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

Mary Magdalene was raised up with Christ because His heart dwelt within her. We've been given the same heart. Mary sought the things above because she'd left everything that lay below behind. And she never turned back. We may do the same, never turning back. Mary died once in the clutches of spiritual powers greater than herself, but her Lord set her free, raised her anew, and hid her in His own heart. So the Lord has done the same for you and me, burying us, raising us, and hiding us in his heart forever.

Christ is risen! (He is risen, indeed!) It doesn't get any better than this! I'm so glad you're here.

I don't know where many of you are at in your walk God, but I do know this. The Lord does care about everything you hold in your heart that is tearing you apart. Friends in Christ, nothing is too great nor too small for Him to heal, to make whole.

And I also know that Jesus wants to work inside of your heart, delivering you from heartache and depression, anger and hurt feelings, the fear and the turmoil you're experiencing in family and work or school, and He wants to give you a whole new life experience, from the basement apartment to the house on the hill!

And I know that as Mary found Jesus in her weakness, so too we find Him in our weakness, and that just as she was made whole, we too can be made whole. And I know that as she gave thanks and was a blessing, we too may give thanks and be a blessing to one another and to our neighbors. For Christ is risen!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week let us pray that the Lord would share his heart with us just as he did with Mary Magdalene.

This week let us give thanks for how he has blessed us so.

And this week let us find opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.