

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

But 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.

Tonight, I want to talk about how this sense of joy can be the center of our day-to-day walk with God and with one another, finding ourselves in the very heart of the resurrected Christ.

OPENING PRAYER

READ Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

In the Gospel we read about how there were many women who went to Jesus' tomb to venerate his body for burial. But the most striking part of this account is how Mary Magdalene is mentioned first. In fact, as we read in Matthew's account

she was the first person to visit Christ's tomb. Let's let that settle into our hearts 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?

Consider how she met Jesus. It was near the beginning of His ministry when and 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!

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. I think it had something to do with something he did in her heart.

Jesus taught at another time, **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."**

The Lord was saying that a person's heart is like a house, complete with furnishings. In Mary's case before she was delivered the furnishings of her heart were evil spirits. So after the spirits were cast out, the house—her heart—was unfurnished, and if it was not refurnished with good things, the evil spirits would return.

So Mary Magdalene didn't wait! She refurnished her heart immediately with the spirit of Christ.

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 he replaced those things with good things, with his love, his joy, and his 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. I got 3-channels. 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? I was poor.

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 TV, antiques, flower gardens, and a kitchen with a nook with a view of a lake.

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

I hadn't done anything to make this experience what it was. I simply said yes to my church members' 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 forces which are great than he. 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 the Gospel of St. John we read that she was weeping at Jesus' tomb, and the angel asked her, "**why are you weeping?**" And she said, "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.

But the angel said to Mary, "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."

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, 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 for you and me, burying us, raising us, and hiding us in his heart forever.

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.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we meditate on the Resurrection of Jesus two millennia ago, let us consider the work he's already doing in our hearts today.

Let us fill our minds with thankfulness for everything the Lord has done and is doing on our behalf.

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