



March 23, 2008

**Focus scripture
John 20:1-18**

Additional scriptures

Acts 10:34-43

or Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

or Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 28:1-10

Do we dare hope
in you, O God, as
your messenger
Mary has said? Do
we dare see you,
O Christ, as your
friend Mary has
seen? Do we dare
heed your call,
O Spirit, as your
servant Mary has
done before us?
Easter bids us say,
and live, Yes!
Alleluia!

Alleluia!

We can rejoice in Easter's news because of its first witness: Mary Magdalene. Resurrection was not that day's prospect. The voice of the Risen Jesus calling her name surprises Mary into recognition, then prepares her for surprising witness. Christ is among us. So said Mary, so say those who follow her lead. Christ *is* risen. Alleluia!

Focus Scripture: John 20:1-18

John and the other gospels tell stories of Jesus restoring to life persons who had died. In each case, the one who died lived again, but still faced death. The resurrection we celebrate at Easter is testimony to Jesus the Christ – who died, was raised, and will not die again.

The Easter account in John differs somewhat from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Mary goes alone to the tomb in John. In the others, she goes with one or more other women. John says Peter and the beloved disciple go to the tomb after Mary's witness. In the other gospels none of the male disciples venture into the tomb.

Mary Magdalene plays an extraordinary role in John's Easter story. She alone goes to the tomb and returns to tell the disciples that Jesus is not there. Her later encounter with Jesus in the garden qualifies her as the first witness to Jesus' resurrection. Beyond that, Jesus *sends* Mary to the other disciples to announce that she has seen the Risen Jesus. As with the Samaritan woman in John, Mary not only sees and believes – she sees and *witnesses*. Her words are the first Easter sermon. In being sent and then proclaiming, Mary becomes apostle to the apostles.

Small details shape John's message. In the first eleven verses, "tomb" occurs nine times. The scene is a place of death. From verse 12 on, tomb is not mentioned. An empty tomb is replaced with the Risen Jesus. The transition between verses 8 and 9 is awkward if "believed" is taken as Easter faith. The next two verses rule out that view. At best, Peter and John believe Mary's earlier word that someone had taken Jesus. Unlike Mary, they do not linger outside the tomb; they return home. "They did not understand." Belief in resurrection does not come from an empty

tomb. Belief in resurrection comes in a restored relationship. Belief in resurrection comes in Mary's gospel preaching: "I have seen the Lord!"

A still unrecognized Jesus asks Mary, "Whom are you looking for?" (verse 15). Jesus asks a similar question of the first two followers in John 1:38. That was a call story. So is this. It is a call story for Mary Magdalene to be the first one to announce the news. It is a call story for John's community and for us, to witness with Mary to what and whom we see and trust.

The other readings also bear witness to the power of God's love as a source of new life. **Jeremiah 31:1-6** affirms God as one whose love enabled Israel to find "grace in the wilderness." **Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24** celebrates God's steadfast love that empowers the hope of life.

Equally clear in these texts is the importance of witness and revealing. **Acts 10:34-43** narrates Peter's witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ, whose impartiality offers acceptance to all. The psalmist witnesses to God's choice of the "stone" rejected by others. The twice-spoken "do not be afraid" of **Matthew 28:1-10** reveals resurrection not to be a matter of fear, but of joyful faith. **Colossians 3:1-4** links the revealing of Christ in God's realm with our hope.



The Easter story continues to be told in the words and deeds of the faithful. Mary started the procession. We are invited to continue it. What do you most identify with in Mary's experience of Easter; why? When have you found yourself "named" and called by Christ? By whom might Easter's gift and news be most needed – how might you or your faith community bear that witness?

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