

Easter Sunday Sermon – April 16, 2017
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera
Readings: Jeremiah 31: 1-6, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20: 1-18, Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Christians worldwide are gathered like we are today with friends and family, proclaiming the most ancient of tenets of Christian belief: Christ is risen! Alleluia! This proclamation will be repeated for the next fifty days of Easter during the opening acclamation of worship as a reminder that Jesus Christ fulfilled the commitment to be a Holy model for humanity and that he is alive in us. With the example of his life, passion, death, and resurrection we receive the pattern laid out by God for humanity, including the promise of eternal life. The readings that we heard through Lent remind us of the cycle of Jesus' life and of our life pattern: to live; to love; to have fun; give to others; receive from others; teach and learn from one another; suffer and die; and to be raised in glory. This life cycle is the most fundamental and wholesome belief of Christianity, a sequence that culminates with resurrection for all humanity like it did for Jesus!

In this year's cycle of Paschal stories Mary Magdalene, Peter, and another disciple are witnesses to the first Easter. We heard how distressed Mary Magdalene became when she found an empty tomb, she was shocked because her beloved friend and teacher wasn't in it. Fear arose in her, perhaps because she knew that there were people who didn't want to let go of Jesus even though he warned them that he would return to His father in heaven. And, so she feared that someone had taken him. She ran to tell others, and once they confirmed what Mary said, they left the cemetery, perhaps equally perplexed as she had been after entering the empty tomb. John the Evangelist said that the disciples didn't yet understand the prophetic scripture that says, "he must rise from the dead." And who could blame them? Jesus had told them to leave everything and follow him; so now what? Where would they go? What would they do? Who would they follow? In who would they believe? These were the questions that raced through the disciples' minds as they came to grips with the passing of their teacher and leader. But Mary wasn't ready to let go. She stayed behind after the others left, trying to figure it all out. The Gospel says that suddenly there were two angels where the body of Jesus had been. They asked why she wept, so she explained that the body of her friend and Lord was gone and she wanted to find him.

Perhaps you have experienced similar moments like Mary's. Moments when you find yourself searching for God, only to be met with emptiness that raises more questions and perhaps even grief. Perhaps you've searched within and beyond hoping for understanding, clarity, replenishment, or peace; only to find that God didn't seem to be there. In moments like these, we might find ourselves in a kind of spiritual vacuum, wondering where Jesus is. There are people who might say, "well if you only pray a little more or really trust harder..." Really? That's missing the point altogether, isn't it? We, like Mary Magdalene, have our moments when we need space; time to reflect, pray, wonder, and hope. I recently heard a friend talk about wondering and how it is a way to open the spirit, to think freely, contemplate without restrictions of "right or wrong" regarding the mystery of God. Spiritual wonder makes room for the Holy Spirit to lead us, inspire

us, and to let us accept where we might find ourselves without judgment. Condemnation and self-criticism might block us from the love of God that we seek, yet the love of God is always present even when we feel alienated from it.

Jesus was beside Mary, watching her try to make sense of the empty tomb. But it wasn't empty, she just needed time to discern, listen, and see beyond. During her wondering, a man appeared and asked her what was going on, she explained and asked for his help because she felt the need to be led not realizing that the Spirit of the Lord was already there.

That's when Mary Magdalene experienced the first Easter, the manifestation of Christ resurrected. Jesus called her by name, "Mary!", and she responded, overcome by the Holy Spirit, "Rabbi, teacher!" Perhaps she remembered the promise made to them at the Last Supper! I can relate to Mary's vulnerability because it is as human as human gets. We come face to face with our human reality and vulnerabilities when we lose something or someone: a job, a house, a friend, a pet, a loved one, money, or an opportunity. These are all part of the cycle of life. We question, we pray, and we wonder how the situation might resolve itself; also part of the same cycle. Mary's response might sum up our response; in God's time, we experience grief and joy; uncertainty and affirmation; hesitation and determination. This is the true witness of Easter! When we feel unsure of our next steps spiritually or in our everyday lives, as we wonder whether the light of Christ is still on in us or not, God, made known to us in Jesus Christ, has a way of showing up where we least expect!

The Resurrection story didn't end there for Mary, nor does it end there for us! Mary recognized the Resurrected Lord and as the gospels tell us, Christ remained with them for another while. But, he hadn't yet ascended into heaven, nor had he given them the most important Jesus-lesson. Fifty days after the Resurrection Jesus would commission his followers. That commissioning completed his earthly cycle. Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and serve others, to share their stories, and to affirm that they would also be raised with Him in glory forever. We are given the same promise and commission: go and tell the others so that the world could be transformed!

As guests in this holy place and as members of St. Gabriel's, I commission you in the name of Jesus Christ, to be proclaimers and deliverers of Christ's Good News which is alive with us and in us. In a moment, we will renew our baptismal vows, we will recommission our belief in the Triune God, in the resurrected Jesus and we'll promise to respect and uphold the dignity of every human being. May the love, hope, and peace of Christ's Resurrection continue in you; may you take the time to wonder and pray for clarity and direction, and may you remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Let us receive the promise and proclaim like Mary Magdalene, "I have seen the Lord". Blessed Easter!