

Text: John 20:11-18

Theme: Words of the Living Savior ... to Mary

Date: April 16, 2017 (Easter Sunrise)

In the Name of our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Dear Son-rise Christians,

Visibly upset, the woman approached the bank cashier with a scowl on her face. She pointed to the sign taped on the counter and the rising volume of her voice revealed her confused fear. *“What do you mean? What about my deposit? Where will I do my banking? And my mortgage?! Who’s going to handle my mortgage?!”* The woman, apparently not thinking as much as she should about the approaching Easter weekend, had read the sign at the bank, *“We Will Be Closed For Good Friday”* and inaccurately concluded that staring on Friday the bank would close forever.

Visibly upset, the woman approached the tomb with tears. She pointed to the place where the dead man had been laid to rest in peace and the volume of her sobbing revealed her confused fear, *“I don’t know where they have put him.”* Mary, apparently not thinking as much as she should about this being the third day since her Master had died, inaccurately concluded that his body was now gone forever.

Words Forgotten

Words. Signs. E-mails. Conversations. Even the clearest communication can somehow be misinterpreted or misunderstood by the recipient. Apparently that’s what had happened concerning Jesus’ previous promises to his followers that he would rise on the third day. It’s Easter Sunday and we who stand on the future side of the third day find it somewhat incredible that on this morning we are still hearing women weep and still seeing disciples disturbed. What about Jesus’ words? We listen to the Easter Gospel and there’s a part of us that feels sorry for Mary but another part that looks at Mary and can’t help but ask along with the angels, *“Why are you crying?”* How could it be, Mary, that Jesus spoke to you so concisely about rising on the third day - and even proved his power over death by raising Lazarus and the widow’s son at Nain and Jairus’ daughter - but you have forgotten his words?

It could only be, Mary, because you are so much like me. How could it be that Jesus speaks to me so convincingly about the power of prayer, but I sometimes forget his words? How could it be that Jesus speaks to me so assuredly about trusting him in times of trouble, but I sometimes forget his words? How could it be that Jesus speaks to me so vividly about the certainty of my forgiveness, but I sometimes forget his words? How could it be that Jesus speaks to me so accurately about the commitment and cost of discipleship, but I sometimes forget his words? Like you, Mary, I am confused by a human nature that gets caught up in the moment and concludes too much from the earthly perspective. **Human tears can be so blinding to heavenly truths.**

“How many times have I told you!?!” Jesus should have screamed at Mary and us like a frustrated parent. But listen to his actual words.

Words of Love

WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU CRYING? WHO IS IT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR? Now, if we would have been in Jesus’ place, we may have jumped up and down and flailed our arms around and shouted, *“Mary, it’s me! It’s me! I did it!”* Jesus aims the spotlight, however, not at himself but at Mary, and her confused fear. You might think that the glorified Jesus - who just broke the world record for enduring excruciating suffering, escaping death’s trap, and entering hell without being made a permanent resident - would want to shake the champagne on the victor’s stand and bask in his own glory. Instead, the Gospels portray a glorified, exalted, resurrected Jesus whose concern is his followers, and their confused fear and crippling forgetfulness. That’s where Jesus begins Mary’s recovery process from forgetting his words and not recognizing him as risen from the dead. **WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU CRYING? WHO IS IT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR?** Jesus helps the wheels of Mary’s faith start spinning. She doesn’t need to be crying if she would only be looking for a living Savior

instead of a dead friend. Jesus appeals not to earthly appearance which is temporary, but to heavenly truths; not to earthly conclusion which can be flawed, but to heavenly promises.

Words of Life

Still a bit confused and thinking Jesus was the gardener, Mary asks again where the body of Jesus has been taken. Still concerned for Mary in love and knowing she needs more direction, Jesus speaks words again. Actually, just one word. **MARY.** Now Mary remembers his words. Now Mary realizes he has kept his word. Now Mary recognizes this man as no stranger but her Savior risen from the dead. The apostle John wrote about how Jesus, our Good Shepherd, knows us personally and calls his sheep by their very own name *“He calls his own sheep by name ... and his sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:3,4).* So don't be afraid!

- Listen to ***The Words of the Living Savior***, who gave his life as a sacrifice for all your sins, only to rise on the third day and conquer sin's curse on him and you. He calls your name, takes your hand, and leads you away from strength sapping guilt to his empowering forgiveness.
- Listen to ***The Words of the Living Savior***, entombed in death, only to rise on the third day and conquer death's claim on him and you. He calls your name, takes your hand, and leads you through your death to your own bodily resurrection on the Last Day.
- Listen to ***The Words of the Living Savior***, who has written your name in the Book of Life. He will call your name on the Last Day as a recipient of everlasting life in heaven because his resurrection unlocks the gates of heaven for all believers.
- Listen to ***The Words of the Living Savior***, who has work for his disciples today. He calls your name along with an assignment to love people with his love and let people know about his resurrection. For that reason, the last words of his conversation with Mary on Easter morning express a call to action.

Words for Others

DO NOT KEEP HOLDING ON TO ME, FOR I HAVE NOT YET ASCENDED TO THE FATHER. GO INSTEAD TO MY BROTHERS AND TELL THEM, ‘I AM ASCENDING TO MY FATHER AND YOUR FATHER, TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD.’ At any joyful reunion the time comes to release the glad embrace and use those same hands for the work ahead. Jesus' work for people on earth would continue but his home base would now be heaven. Mary's work as a follower of Jesus also needed to continue and it would start with her speaking to the other followers of Jesus, followers Jesus refers to with another word, the term of endearment, “brothers.” Jesus' first assignment to his followers then and today is this: not to be afraid. Jesus is still our brother and that means God remains and will always be our Father. Jesus is still the second person of the Trinity as God, and has not been dethroned by death, so the God who saves us is still intact. We can be absolutely sure of our new life in him and trust with certainty all his words. Amen.