

Easter Sunday 2019
John 20: 1-18
Hannover International Worship

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. As we worship together on this glorious Easter morning I have one simple message, friends, that I hope you can take with you easily and that's this: Be a Woman! Now for half of us that will be easy to remember and to carry out. For the rest of you, I ask that you stay with me and hopefully by the end you too can say yes to this proposition.

Perhaps I should clarify my statement: I mean to say, Be an Easter Woman! You will recognize that as a female pastor I have a predisposition to see the women in the Biblical stories and to pay attention to how the Trinity interacts with, transforms and utilizes women in Scripture. But I must confess that it wasn't until into my adulthood that I noticed in all four Gospels it was the women who were at the empty tomb first – to first to witness the resurrection of the Lord.

I am not sure if it is important or not in Germany like it may be in other parts of the world, including the United States, but I felt it valuable to emphasize the importance of this point in scripture again – women were the first witnesses and evangelists of the risen Christ! And I was moved to point out its importance again because of a phone call I had a couple of months ago with my nephew who is 24 years old. He is a very faithful young man and is attending quite a large church in southern Indiana but called me concerned: the sermon that he heard on the day he called was all about how women should not be, and were not allowed to be pastors. There seems to be a re-emerging trend in some corners of Christianity where women in positions of Christian leadership are being questioned. So my nephew and I had a lengthy conversation about what he heard at church, what scripture says and how to interpret that, and the role of God's call on your life and how to respond.

After that conversation I recognized, once again, that it is important to remember that God calls us, male and female, to be followers of Christ and with that call empowers us to be disciples in this world and a blessing to those around us. So for today I would like to highlight three characteristics from Mary Magdalene to highlight the traits of being an Easter Woman.

To be an Easter Woman means to **love Jesus**. Mary **loved** Jesus and supported him in his work. In the Gospel of Luke we learn that Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven demons and that Jesus healed her and other women of diseases and evil spirits. These women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and others were with Jesus and the twelve disciples *helping to support them out of their own means*. Here is an important reflection: the women were financially independent enough that they could support Jesus in his ministry out of their own means. For many of us it can be an important reminder to show our love of Jesus and support the work of God in world by loosening our financial means. Do you have property? Do you have

investments? Do you have an abundance out of which you can give to God? I am not asking for you to be unwise in your gifts, but perhaps there are one or two of you here today that need to be reminded that you can express your love for Jesus by supporting him in his continued work of healing and transformation in this world. They gave the gifts they had – there is no gift which cannot be used in the service of Christ.

However, we can neither understand Jesus or help others to understand Him, unless we take our hearts to Him as well as our resources. Mary's display of love in our Gospel passage for today is palpable. Not only was she at the tomb before first light, she was moved to tears thinking the body of her Savior had been moved. Not only did the angels ask her why she was crying but Jesus did as well when he addressed her. Can you believe it? A woman crying! But Mary's one desire was to weep her love over Jesus' body. Many of us come from cultures or backgrounds where physical displays of affection or outward signs of deep devotion to Christ are not the norm. Here Mary gives us permission as Easter people to love Jesus with our heart, soul, mind and strength. This deep love leads to our second characteristic of being an Easter Woman.

Because of her deep love and devotion Mary **listened** to Jesus' voice and addressed him as Teacher. Five years ago we were preparing to move to Germany and a very poignant observation was made by one of our pastors on that Easter Sunday. He pointed out that Mary turns *twice* in this encounter. Verse 14 reads, "At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus." And then in verse 16 it reads, "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'" She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic 'Rabboni!' which means Teacher." She turns and then turns again, attentive to the voice of the Savior who knows her by name! Five years ago this became a powerful image for me because I thought I knew where I was supposed to be. We tend to think we know where we should be going trying to call our own shots, only to find out Jesus is calling us by name to locations we could never imagine! As Easter people, let us listen once again for God calling our names leading us to people or places where resurrection is taking place.

And this listening, then, leads to obedience – Mary addresses Jesus as Teacher. I heard a revered fellow scholar say at a theological conference this past January that we will forever be learning from God – he laughed and said he has never died before so even up to the last breath he will learn from God how to go through the ebb and flow of life and even death with love and grace. As Easter people to love Christ is to learn from Christ. Jesus commands Mary to go and tell the disciples not to hold on to him because he needed to return to the Father. And that leads to our third Easter characteristic.

As Easter People we love and listen and then we share the story! Mary **witnessed** Christ's resurrection and shared the story. Twice in John 20 Mary speaks up and shares what she has seen and experienced. First she goes to Peter and John to tell them the Lord had been taken and she didn't know where he was. The second time, having seen and spoken with Jesus, she goes to the disciples with this good news: "I have seen the Lord!" and she reported all that Jesus had said to her. Easter

People, share what God has done in your life. Talk about what you have seen and heard from the Lord. Witness to what God has done in your life or in the life of others! It can simply be sharing a story of what God has done in your life with a family member. I remember when I was on home for a break during my university years talking about the miracles of God in the world and I asked my mom if she had ever experienced a miracle. She recalled a time when we were living in a very small town in Michigan, my dad being a pastor of a church. We were all very young children at the time and I think my mom was overwhelmed with having to do all the work around the house and try to raise us kids as well. I know I gave her a handful! But she was really down and having a hard time. She was washing dishes one night and praying, asking God to help, for a sign that she was not alone. There was a window that she could look out right above the kitchen sink and as she was washing and praying she looked out of that window and saw Jesus walking along the hillside just beyond our backyard. She looked and looked and lo and behold he was there walking along the ridge. She was overwhelmed with joy and realized that Jesus was there with her, supporting her as a young wife and mother. Story-telling, being a witness, can be a powerful tool for the transformation of lives. I recognize the absolute bravery and empowerment of Mary Magdalene – last year as thousands of women around the world were finally empowered to share their gut wrenching stories of pain and abuse I realized we as women are most often pressured to remain silent. For some it took years, even decades, to share their stories of painful experience. But when stories of healing, of life, of purpose, of hope are shared they can lead to movements that have global impact. Mary shared her story with the disciples and the word of the Resurrection spread. It doesn't need to be eloquent – we know God uses the least and humble to share the Good News of the kingdom of God. Mary simply told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!"

So friends, be an Easter Woman, be an Easter Man! Love the Lord. Listen for his voice and allow Christ to teach you and mold you. Witness to what God has done in your life – share that story with someone this Easter season. And in all ways may what we say and do reflect the light of the Resurrected Christ. I'll close today with a poem by Jan Richardson – consider it our blessing for being Easter People.

You had not imagined
That something so empty
Could fill you
To overflowing,

And now you carry
The knowledge
Like an awful treasure
Or like a child
That curls itself
Within your heart:

How the emptiness

Will bear forth
A new world
You cannot fathom
But on whose edge
You stand.

So why do you linger?
You have seen,
And so you are
Already blessed.
You have been seen,
And so you are
the blessing.

There is no other word
You need.
There is simply
To go
And tell.
There is simply
To begin. AMEN.