

THE GOOD NEWS

Mark 16:1-8 Text vs. 6 *“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him”*

Have you heard the story about little eight-year-old Johnny in Sunday School on Easter Sunday? Well, Johnny’s family weren’t regular in their church attendance. In fact, they only went to church on Easter Sunday. So, Johnny and his family walked through the church door, sat down, and sang *“He Arose”* along with the choir and the congregation. After a few announcements by the Pastor the children were dismissed to their Sunday School classes. With a little help, Johnny found his class and was soon surrounded by a dozen other giggly eight-year-olds. Miss Martha began the class by saying, “Hello boys and girls! Do you know what special day today is?” Five in the class shouted out as loud as they could “Easter!” “Fantastic!” Miss Martha replied. “Now, who knows why Easter is so special?” “I know, I know!” a little girl in the corner cried out, “It’s because of Jesus!” “That’s right Suzie! Jesus is what makes Easter special! And what did Jesus do?” “I know, I know!” Jeremy shot his hand up hopping up and down. “Ok Jeremy, what did Jesus do?” “He died on the cross!” “Well, that’s right. But that’s not all. What else happened?” “I know, I know!” yelled Tammy. “They put him in a grave, and he stayed there for three days!” Miss Martha said, “Excellent Tammy! That’s right! But that’s still not all....what else happened?” The kids were quiet and looked puzzled for a moment. But little Johnny thought he remembered this part of the story when he was here in Sunday School a year ago. He shot his hand up and shouted, “I know, I know!” “Johnny! It’s great to have you back with us for another Easter! Can you tell us the rest of the story?” “Sure!” Johnny replied confidently. “After three days, he came out of the grave and saw his shadow. So, there were six more weeks of winter!”

. . . You know, there are a lot of people like that. They’re confused about the Resurrection of Jesus. Not just eight-year-olds. Regular church attendees have mistaken ideas about what happened on that first Easter morning. And our lesson today helps understand all that. The discovery of Jesus’ empty tomb is the focal point of Mark’s Gospel. It’s central to the Christian belief. His resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith. Mark’s account of the risen Jesus has Mary Magdalene, one of His closest women disciples and Mary, the wife of Cleopas and the mother of James and John (Acts 1:13) who stood by the cross during Jesus’ crucifixion, and Salome’ who had also stood in the shadow of the cross with her heart heavy and faith unwavering as she witnessed the suffering of her Lord. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to His tomb’s door. Now, they were the first to witness the resurrection! Those three women had gone early after the Sabbath had passed to Jesus’ tomb to anoint His body with spices. According to Jewish custom, anointing was a way to honor and prepare a body for proper burial. After Jesus’ death on the cross, according to the New Testament, *38”Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission he took the body away. 39 And was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. 40 Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it with the spices in strips of linen. That was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. And in the garden, there was a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.* (John 19:38-42)

The Day of Preparation was a time of readiness. However, it was Friday. People would suspend normal business and social activity to prepare food in advance for both the weekly Sabbath and the Passover feast which are in the background of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. It was late in the day on Friday when Joseph and Nicodemus were given permission for the body of Jesus. They hurriedly took it and placed it in Joseph’s own tomb in a garden near the place of Jesus’ crucifixion. And it was not until two days later, early on the first day of the week, Sunday, that Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James and John, and Salome’ bought spices and went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. The women didn’t know that Joseph and Nicodemus had already prepared Jesus’ body for burial. Their act of anointing Jesus’ body was different from the Jewish tradition of preparing a body for burial. Myrrh is an ointment extracted from a small, thorny tree that has antiseptic properties and can be applied to abrasions or minor skin ailments. Myrrh has a fragrant aroma. It’s used in perfume. And it was a key ingredient in Jewish holy incense described in Exodus 30:34-38. Myrrh has deep spiritual significance. Its fragrance has both an earthly and heavenly significance that represents the connection between God and His people. So, bringing fragrant spices to mask the odor of decay was the right thing for these women to do. In those times, the lack of refrigeration and modern embalming methods made it necessary. Even today in poor Mideast countries this practice has continued. So, adding spices to the deceased was not out of the question. And as they

were on their way to Jesus' tomb, the women asked each other, *"Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"*

But when they arrived at the tomb, the stone had been rolled away! And there, the three Myrrh bearing women wept seeing that the tomb was empty where Jesus body had been placed. Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb, weeping. She had peered into the empty tomb and saw two angels in white were standing near where Jesus body would have been. They asked why she was crying. She replied someone had taken away her Lord and she didn't know where they had placed Him. At that moment, Jesus Himself appeared to her, but she didn't recognize Him. Jesus asked, *"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"* Thinking He was the gardener, she begged for information about Jesus' whereabouts.

That's when Jesus simply said, *"Mary."* And in that warm moment she recognized Him, and cried in Aramaic, *"Rabboni!"* which means "Teacher." Mary stood amazed. Her heart excited. Her eyes fixed on how He looked. She reached out, longing to cling to Him, but Jesus whispered, *"Not yet—I ascend to the Father."* Jesus was in a transition phase between His resurrection and ascension. His mission was not yet complete. He needed to ascend to the Father. He told her to go tell His disciples, *"I have seen the Lord!"* The Resurrection had begun! So, filled with fear and joy, the three women quickly left the empty tomb to deliver the message. They ran with hearts burning to share the news with the disciples that the tomb was empty! Their souls were filled with wonder and joy. Soon her story spread about an empty tomb and a risen Lord. A tale of redemption. A story of love. It would forever be heard. And that wondrous happening invites you to experience the same wonder of the resurrection and to share the Good News with others. *"Don't be alarmed," the angel said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him"*

Mary Magdalene was a woman of strong faith. She had played a key role in the life of Jesus and the early Christian church. Before meeting Jesus, she had been possessed by seven demons. And Jesus had delivered her from her torment. She became one of His most loyal followers. Now, you may not encounter literal demon possession in this modern world. But you can learn from Mary's experience. Avoid trying anything that's spiritually harmful. Spiritual danger can be anything that threatens your spiritual well-being, like when you become indifferent to the church. Or you lack enthusiasm for growing your faith. That's spiritually harmful. And then contentment can lead to stagnation that keeps you from having spiritual growth. Having a lack of spiritual maturity comes from failing to deepen your understanding of God's Word, the Bible. But if your spiritual journey is spiritually dangerous His Way can keep you from choosing sin over holiness. Because sin can become more appealing to you than obedience to God, it will eat away at your spiritual strength. Drifting away from God is like a ship without a lifeboat. When you're sinking, how are you going to be rescued without one? Make Jesus your lifeboat! Because if sin isn't recognized and taken seriously, then spiritual danger looms just over the horizon. A dull conscience can lead to disobedience. And disobedience is what can keep you from God. But if you change your path from a harmful path in life to a healthy one, you can protect yourself from spiritual harm.

So, Mary, along with other wealthy women, followed Jesus and provided for Him out of their own resources. She was present at His crucifixion. She witnessed where He was buried. And she holds a special place in Christian history because she was the first person to see the risen Lord. She was the first to tell of His resurrection. Mary Magdalene's story serves as an example of faith and dedication. Her unwavering loyalty to Jesus from His ministry to His resurrection, inspires believers. Mary Magdalene's significance lies in her faithful role as a witness to the resurrection. And her unwavering love for Jesus represents the power of redemption that makes her an important figure in Christianity. Mary Magdalene's life teaches about faith, redemption, and unwavering devotion. Her example should inspire you to walk more closely with Jesus and to live your faith boldly. Mary became a new creation after encountering Jesus. You, too, can find redemption and transformation in Jesus. Your identity is in Christ. Not in your past mistakes. After meeting Jesus, her life revolved around Him. She followed Him. Witnessed His crucifixion. Was the first to see Him after the resurrection. Now, how about you concentrate on Jesus in your life making Him the center of your world. Letting Him be the sun around which your world revolves. Seeking Him daily. Listening to His voice. And following His teachings. Never stop serving God. Even when you are faced with skepticism or challenges, be steadfast in your devotion. Jesus saw worth in Mary, regardless of her past circumstances. Mary received healing from her demons. She witnessed Jesus' power.

On this Easter Sunday, you too should seek God's healing power in your life. Whether it's physical, emotional, or spiritual, trust in God's grace and renewal. Walk in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene. Learn from her life that Faith and Grace can become one. Her journey echoes through time like a glowing flame guiding you toward the Risen Christ. Join with her in telling the world, *"He is risen!"* Hallelujah and AMEN