

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan
March 31, 2013
John 20:1-18

What's your Reaction to Jesus' Resurrection?

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Certain moments define generations. I think the moment that will define my generation the most is September 11, 2001. I can remember exactly where I was, what I was doing, what time it was, what radio station it was, what the weather was like and who was with me in the car when I was driving to school. My initial reaction was I thought it was a joke. Then confused. Then fascinated. Maybe you've had some moment like that in life and maybe you haven't. But today we want to compare a few reactions. The reaction of Mary, the reaction of John and our reaction to Jesus' Resurrection...

What's your Reaction to Jesus' Resurrection

In order to look at Mary's reaction we need to study some of her history with Jesus. Mary's first contact with Jesus came when Jesus drove seven demons from her. She, along with Joanna, Susanna and many others who Jesus had healed, supported Jesus in his earthly ministry. They provided for Jesus' physical needs and accompanied him on his journeys.

They loved Jesus so much that they stayed with him during his trial and subsequent execution. Mary had become close with Salome and Mary, the mother of James, and they went with Joseph when he buried Jesus' body on Good Friday. It was late in the day on Friday and they all agreed to come back early on Sunday morning and anoint the body of Jesus.

The group was on their way to the tomb to put the spices on Jesus' body. They all must've been filled with grief and despair because they had lost their beloved Jesus. Though their discussion turned practical because they were wondering who would roll the stone away, but when they got there the stone was already rolled away.

Mary was shocked to see the tomb open and ran back to tell Peter and John. Think about how hysterical she must've been when she said to Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Mary then returns to the tomb still upset over the fact that she can't find Jesus. She sees two angels but doesn't get why they are there.

When the angels ask Mary what she is doing at the tomb she says to them, "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him." She hits an emotional low. Not only was her beloved Jesus dead but she didn't even know where his body was. Her heart was breaking inside of her and it probably felt like it was too much for her to bear.

Jesus then appeared to her. He asked her why she was crying and Mary gave him the same stock answer she had given twice before. Jesus responds only with her name and Mary immediately knows who it is. Imagine the confusion Mary felt. First she thought Jesus was dead. Now she sees him alive. She grabs a hold of Jesus and she never wants to let go of him.

Mary's gut reaction was that she never wanted to let Jesus go. Jesus needed to direct her away from this reaction. He says to Mary, "Do not cling to me." Mary's initial reaction, though flattering, was dead wrong. It was short sighted. Jesus needed Mary to look at the bigger picture. That is why he went on after he told Mary not to cling to him.

He explained himself, "I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Jesus was finally able to say mission accomplished and he was ready to go home. All of the Old Testament prophecies written about

him pointed to this day. The day when sin, death and the devil were defeated and he could show it in a visible manner.

His resurrection showed he was the son of God like he had said. He could guarantee the fact that everyone's sins were forgiven. He now wanted his people to echo the words of Isaiah, "Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world." Jesus then told Mary to go and tell his brothers what she had seen and this time her reaction was spot on because she left immediately and told them what she had seen.

John's initial reaction to the resurrection was a bit different. He remarks about what happened at the empty tomb, "Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed." John was closer to the truth than Mary, but Jesus hadn't sent the Holy Spirit in the special way yet so he didn't know had happened because he remarks, "(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)"

The disciples wouldn't fully understand the Scriptures until the Holy Spirit came to them on Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came upon them their timidity disappeared and they preached the word of God fearlessly and boldly to the ends of the earth. When Jesus commanded his disciples to go and preach to all nations they reacted the same way Mary did. They listened and did as Jesus told them.

What is your reaction to the resurrection of Jesus? Is it ho hum and been there done that for all the years of my life? I appreciate knowing the fact I am saved and that is all I want and need to know? At least I can enjoy the picturesque beauty of the front of church and we get to sing some of my favorite hymns again. If your reaction is anything like this hear the words of Jesus again, "Do not cling to me."

In order to help you quit clinging to Jesus I want you for a few seconds to remove any memories of any and all Easters you can think of. I want you to place yourself in the shoes of a new Christian. We have been going through this journey called Lent where we have heard about the suffering and sorrow of Jesus. I think Lent is easy for us to relate to because we live in a world of sin and sorrow and we understand sin and sorrow.

But you come to Easter Sunday and it all changes. The church goes from purple, black and somber to white, bright and joyful. It seems unbelievable. Sin and sorrow gone just like that? No more crying or mourning or pain? What would your reaction be? It might bring tears to some people's eyes. It might put a smile on others that you can't wipe off. It might be an inner peace and security that is known only to you.

But the one common thing is the joy of knowing our sins are forgiven and nothing can take that away from us. Nothing! We all might have different reactions to certain events. We might remember a whole lot more about the event than we care to at times too. But may our reaction to Jesus resurrection never change. I pray that it always is, "Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia."