# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Mary Magdalene”**

**John 20:11-18**

**May 2, 2021**

In our sermon series following Easter, we have been meeting various people who encountered the risen Christ. This morning we meet Mary Magdalene. We first learn of Mary in the Gospel of Luke where we are told she was a disciple of Jesus. Jesus had cleansed her of seven demons, and she was among a group of women who travelled with him. Mary was a witness of the crucifixion and she went with the group to the place of Jesus’ burial in a tomb. In the verses immediately preceding the ones we are about to read, she had gone to the tomb early Sunday morning in order to anoint Jesus’ body with burial spices. Arriving, she saw that the stone covering the entrance into the tomb had been rolled away. She ran and found Peter and John, two of Jesus’ disciples, and told them what she had seen. They ran to the tomb and confirmed that the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. Then they went home. Mary had followed the two men back to the tomb, and this is where we pick up the story in John 20:11-18

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”). “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

The biblical account focuses first upon the weeping Mary, standing outside the tomb, convinced that Jesus is dead and his body has been taken away. Stooping, she looks into the tomb and this time it’s not empty. She sees two men (we are told they are angels), and they ask her why she is weeping. Why are you so distressed and saddened? What has upset you to the point of weeping? “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied. She had seen him die. She had seen his dead body placed in the tomb. She had come to anoint his body. But, there is no body. What else can she think than that someone has taken his body away? What else, indeed?

Jesus had clearly said several times to his disciple that he would rise again on the third day. But, like the rest of them, Mary trusted her senses more than she trusted Jesus’ words. She trusted her ability to gather information from the world around her and come to her own conclusions more than she trusted the promises of God. How often are you and I like Mary? We look at how the world around us treats Jesus, how they work so hard to remove him from our everyday lives in society, how they use his name as a swear word, how they deny his divinity, his resurrection, his salvation, and we become distressed because, like Mary, we have concluded that they are taking away our Lord.

Martin Luther once became upset over something that had gone wrong, and for several days he was surly and depressed. On the third day of his bad mood his wife came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes. “Who’s dead?” he asked her. “God,” she replied. Luther was shocked. “What do you mean, God is dead?” “Well,” she replied, “the way you’ve been acting I assumed he was.” Luther had forgotten the promises of God.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” What part of “never” don’t we understand? “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of time.” Do we trust that “always” means “always”? “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” No matter what the world says or does, they cannot take Jesus away from us.

“Mary,” Jesus says to her. He’s right there with her, even though she had convinced herself that he was long gone. He’s right there for her, in spite of her having forgotten what he had promised would happen. He loves her because that is who he is, and there is nothing that she can do that will change Jesus’ love for her.

Later that same day Jesus will appear to his disciples and they will be filled with joy as they too encounter the risen Christ. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, is not there for that meeting, and although the disciples tell him they have seen the risen Lord, he will not believe unless he sees for himself. So, about a week later, Jesus appears to him, and Thomas believes. Then Jesus said to him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

You and I came to believe in Jesus, not because we saw him physically but because of the faith that God gave us spiritually. So, let us continue to walk by faith and not by sight, believing that God is in control of all that is going on in the world around us, regardless of how we see or analyze it. When we become upset because of some anti-Christ word or activity, let us turn to Jesus, like Mary did, and realize that he’s right here with us. They have not taken Jesus away, and they will never be able to do so.