

## **“WHOM DO YOU SEEK?” (4/4/10)**

**SCRIPTURES:** Acts 10: 34-43 & John 20: 1-18

**KEY CONCEPTS:** How might the ancient story of Jesus’ resurrection impact our contemporary lives and daily spirituality?

### **OPENING READING:**

In the tomb of the soul, we carry secret yearnings, pains, frustrations, loneliness, fears, regrets, worries.

*In the tomb of the soul, we take refuge from the world & its heaviness.*

In the tomb of the soul, we wrap ourselves in the security of darkness.

*Sometimes this is a comfort. Sometimes it is an escape.*

Sometimes it prepares us for experience. Sometimes it insulates us from life.

*Sometimes this tomb-life gives us time to feel the pain of the world & reach out to heal others. Sometimes it numbs us & locks us with our own concerns. In this season where light & darkness balance the day, we seek balance for ourselves.*

Grateful for the darkness that has nourished us, we push away the stone & invite the light to awaken us to the possibilities within us & among us—possibilities for new life in ourselves & in our world. (“Rolling Away the Stone” by Sara Moores Campbell)

### **VERSES FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN:**

*“And the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness & the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:4b-5)*

*“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb & saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.” (John 20:1)*

This opening verse from today’s Gospel reading may well have been John’s way of highlighting once again the symbolism of dark/light that was first noted in *John 1:5*.

In today’s Gospel reading, we read the traditional lectionary account of the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ & from that space I ask myself—even as I ask each of you—what does this ancient story that is foundational to our faith really mean for those of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How might this story of old positively impact our spiritual & daily lives?

This morning I’d like to accomplish 3 things:

1. Look at the story from John’s Gospel, particularly as it pertains to Mary.
2. Note a contemporary application of resurrection & the transformative power & hope that springs from that revelation.
3. Close with a few thoughts for our own lives to consider in light of Jesus’ resurrection.

### **WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?**

### **PRAYER:**

### **GOSPEL OF JOHN: 20: 1-19:**

Today of all days—Easter Sunday—must be filled with “God talk”. You know, talk about God doing things that only God can do, like raising a person from the dead.

**ONLINE READING:** According to Martin E. Marty (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2), “God talk” turns an ancient story into a prophetic word to help make the

conversion of humans possible. Conversion is the opening of our eyes & hearts plus the openness to faith, hope & love. It's (conversion) isn't something one can accomplish through our own strength or strength. The Holy Spirit had to be active.

From a positive perspective, conversion refers to turning around, being turned & maybe even being awakened to a new way of thinking or being. Mary had to be converted...for what she originally sought was a corpse to anoint & mourn, but instead of a corpse, God wanted to offer her a resurrected Christ that would totally transform Mary's life. Mary believed the "infamous they" had done something with Jesus' body; **NOT** that God had done something & was even now doing it.

**MARY'S GRIEF:** Mary's grief prevented her from seeing clearly. The tomb was empty; then 2 angelic beings appeared to Mary & even Jesus appeared to her. And yet her mind played tricks on her or maybe her grief blinded her to any conclusion but her own: that grave robbers had stolen Jesus' dead body.

*Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"*

That first question is odd, don't you think? Why are you weeping? She's standing outside a tomb, why she's weeping should be apparent.

And yet the 2<sup>nd</sup> question gets to the heart of Mary's dilemma. Whom are you looking for?" And isn't that questioning a lifelong quest for many of us here today? Whom do you seek? How might God play into the search? And are we willing to reconsider a new way of being & believing, to be turned from what we currently think or see—through merely human eyes & hearts—to find what only a Resurrected Christ can offer us?

Mary turned & saw Jesus but still, she didn't recognize him. It wasn't until Jesus called her by name...in the way that only Jesus could say "Mary" that she understood & turned "her face toward Him" (v. 16) Mary, like us, can not be changed or transformed from our current way of thinking/being unless we are open to change, open to stirrings & signs. Open to different ways of being than what we've currently experienced. And even as she turned, she was compelled to go & tell the others.

### **TRANSITION:**

Have you ever tried to imagine what it might have been like to be Mary of Magdala? To have your blinding grief turned to uncontainable joy? Various authors, musicians and artists offers us all glimpses into the joy of reunion with loved ones. And one of my favorite contemporary examples comes from Alice Walker's "*The Color Purple*" in this dialogue between Shug & Celie.

### **LITERARY ILLUSTRATION:**

**SHUG:** Now look here. I found a letter for you. From somebody in Africa, goin' by the stamps.

**CELIE:** It's from Nettie!

**NETTIE:** (The Letter Reads): Dear Celie, I know you think I am dead. But I am not. I've been writing every week all these years, but I guess you haven't gotten any of my letters because you haven't written back.

**CELIE:** **She's alive.**

**NETTIE:** You probably won't get this one either, 'cause I'm sure Mister is still the only one to take mail out of the box, but if you do, one thing I want you to know, **I love you, and I am not dead.**

**CELIE: Nettie's alive! She's alive!**

(From: <http://www.allmusicals.com/lyrics/colorpurple/actifinale.htm>)

As you may know, this dialogue is the closing scene of Act I. And it is from this ONE truth that Nettie, Celie's younger sister, is alive that empowers Celie to believe & change how she is in the world! Knowing that Nettie is alive strengthens Celie to stand up to Mister, express her love for Shug & change the circumstances of her life!

### **TRANSITION:**

So, why does the resurrected Christ matter to 21<sup>st</sup> century followers? Why does Jesus' resurrection matter to you this morning? How has it changed you & your life?

### **CLOSING ILLUSTRATION:**

One way to answer this question is to tell you a story from my sabbatical. After I had sent in my 1<sup>st</sup> thesis draft & gotten most of it ready for the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft, I took 4 days off & drove over to see Jordan for part of her spring break. Unfortunately, I forgot to double check to make sure my CD case was in the truck. So, I set out for MS—which is a 7 hour drive no matter how fast you drive ☺--I spent some time (like I always do on long trips) praying for people I love, OHMCC, the nation, the world, etc.

After a little while I decided to listen to some music...thankfully, I had the sound track to *Wicked* so I listened to that CD & then when I was ready for a different CD, I realized my music was not with me. Only one CD—*Wicked*—had made the trip to MS! AND what I realized is that the music in Broadway plays has a beginning, middle & an end that usually returns to the beginning or at least has a running theme....)

So, in answer to why does the resurrected Christ matter to us this morning...I return to our opening poem for a few suggestions:

***We seek Jesus because:*** we carry secret yearnings, pains, frustrations, loneliness, fears, regrets, worries ***that only Christ can bear for us.***

***We need Jesus this morning because:*** we sometimes need refuge from the world & its heaviness.

***We need Jesus because:*** He is our comfort & He prepares us for what's next in life. And sometimes He even insulates us from the horrors of life AND other times He helps us to endure the horrors of life.

***We need Jesus this morning because:*** Sometimes He gives us time to feel the pain of the world & reach out to heal others. And where light & darkness balance the day, we seek balance for ourselves.

***Jesus helps us to be*** grateful for the darkness that has nourished us even as He helps us to push away the stone & invite the light to awaken us to the possibilities within us & among us—possibilities for new life in ourselves & in our world.