

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF DENTON

REV. JOHN BURTON

APRIL 24, 2011 – EASTER SUNDAY – 10:50 AM MAIN SERVICE

SERMON: “MARY, WEeping”

TEXT: JOHN 20: 1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Haven’t we been there?

Have you lost a loved one – a parent, spouse, child, or friend? Didn't your heart ache? Can you remember the numbness and how lost you felt?

Mary, weeping in the garden, alone.

Mary had seen the empty tomb and then run to tell Peter and John, who came running. They had seen the open tomb and, first Peter and later John, they went in and saw that it was empty.

Peter and John knew something had happened. The text goes so far as to say that John "believed" but what he believed is in doubt because the text says "he saw and believed, for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead."

So, believing something but still confused about everything, Peter and John left; left Mary all alone at the tomb.

Mary, still weeping, peers into the empty tomb – and finds out that it is not empty at all. It is filled with angels! Specifically, two angels sat where Jesus' body had laid such a short time ago.

They speak to her. (That an angel would speak to a woman tells you that we are not in the Old Testament any longer – a new day has dawned!) They say to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Imagine, if someone you didn't really know came up to you at the funeral of one of your loved ones and said, "Friend, don't cry – he or she is in a much better place now."

Be honest...just how helpful would you find that comment? Would it dry your tears? Well, then maybe you can imagine Mary's initial response to the angels.

She answers, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." She tells them that not only is she grieving over the death of Jesus but now she must also face the brutal insult of his body's being stolen. How could she not weep? As of yet, she cannot even imagine a resurrected Jesus!

Having had quite enough of the seemingly slow witted angels she turns her back on them (nothing that a man would ever have considered) and begins to walk when she sees another person, not an angel.

This person asks her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

Does anyone here really think that Jesus did not know why she was crying and for whom she was looking?

Mary assumes this man is the gardener? Gardener? In a cemetery? Maybe they didn't have a word in Greek for Sexton, keeper of the cemetery? So she assumed she was speaking with the individual who tidied up around the tombs, cut the grass, pulled the weeds, removed all the decaying flowers, and such.

She looks at him and says, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me you have laid him, and I will take him away."

How did she not recognize him?

Did he look different?

Was she really not looking at him as she talked?

Was the sun in her eyes?

Were her eyes all wet from tears?

Or was it just one of those things – not recognizing people you don't expect to see in a certain place?

This is important. We want to know. How will we recognize Jesus when he comes back? Jesus IS coming back – Jesus promised to come back for us!

Mary doesn't recognize Jesus...until he calls her by name.

Instantly she knows!! --- I think that is the way it will be for us, too.

When Jesus comes back we won't know what will be his:

Skin color

Eye color

Hair color

Gender (Gosh that blows my mind but the Bible really doesn't say.)

Northern or Southern hemisphere, Eastern or Western world

Republican, Democrat, Independent or...

We may not recognize Jesus – so how will we know?

Relax – I’ve got this one! No guessing – just fill in the blank: You will know when Jesus calls your name with love.

Mary heard Jesus call her name, she recognized Jesus instantly, called out “Rabbouni,” which means “teacher,” and reached out to hug Jesus.

I know not everyone is but I’m big on hugging. In fact, I am of the opinion that when most people get to heaven, clear customs at the Pearly Gates, and get through the new member orientation, their first thought will be to find all their loved ones and enjoy long, lingering embraces!

Jesus does not tell her “No, I don’t like hugs!” But he does tell her “Not yet” for he was ascending to God – first things first!

So Mary went back to see the Disciples, for a second time, but this time she did not bring them an empty tomb mystery to be solved.

She brought her first-person testimony – “I have seen the Lord.”

I’ve always wondered if she didn’t wink at Peter and John and say, “Don’t you wish that you hadn’t left me all alone at the tomb. If you had only stayed with me then you would have also seen Jesus!”

Christians, for the most part, do not believe because we can logically deduce from science or philosophy or astronomy or history or psychology that there has to be a loving God.

Christians, for the most part, believe because we have first-hand, eye-witness testimony of Mary, Peter, John, other Disciples, even from old Doubting Thomas whose doubts were well grounded but overcome when Jesus presented the gaping wounds in his hands and side for Thomas to probe and verify, We also have the testimony of the greatest Christian skeptic of all, Paul, Pharisee of the Pharisees, who had persecuted Christians with bloody zeal. Paul met the Risen Lord on the Road to Damascus and was struck blind by the enormity of what he had not seen and by the Truth which he had so ruthlessly persecuted.

Their first-person eye-witness accounts of the resurrection and meeting with Jesus post crucifixion are well preserved for all to read.

The account of these witnesses tell us three things:

First, that Jesus died for our sins, rose from the tomb on the third day, and ascended into heaven. Victorious over dead, sin, and Satan.

Second, that when Jesus arose he did not abandon his Disciples but came back to them and all the believers. Even though Jesus is now based in Heaven Jesus still loves and cares for all who believe.

And lastly, that the Risen Lord will break the steely caskets of death and bring all of his beloved, all of those who believe in and love the Lord, into God's Heavenly Kingdom, forever. Hopefully that means YOU and ME.

What shall we do with the eye-witness account of Mary and the others?

Shall we mumble a half-hearted hallelujah and mark our calendars to come back for Christmas?

Shall we go back to a secular work environment and a home life that has no time for prayer, worship, and acts of Christian kindness and mercy?

Or shall we make our lives into a hallelujah – witnessing to the resurrection, caring for the needy, loving those who are difficult to love, working for peace and justice, praying with joy and fervor.

So, what will you do, with the Good News?  
What will you do? You!