

Sermon for the Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Day

April 12, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year A: Acts 10:34–43; Psalm 118:14–17, 22–24; Colossians 3:1–4; John 20:1–18**

It is only in Matthew and in John’s gospels that the Risen Jesus speaks on the morning of the resurrection. In this year of the lectionary cycle, we heard Matthew last night and we hear John this morning.

In Matthew, Jesus meets Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” as the women are going “quickly” from the tomb to share the message the angel has given them for the disciples. They have no trouble recognizing the risen Lord when he greets them with the word, “Rejoice.”¹ Given that the evangelist has just told us that the women left the tomb with “great joy,” there’s every reason to give the Greek greeting here its primary and grammatical meaning, it’s literally an imperative, a command, “be in a state of happiness, be glad, rejoice.”²

The women respond by prostrating themselves before him. Jesus has these words for them, “Go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee, and there they

¹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 606–7.

² *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ἀμαρτία,”

will see me.”³ In Galilee, the evangelist tells of Jesus’ commissioning the eleven male disciples. I don’t think the women to whom Jesus spoke stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Today is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but I can’t help but be sad that the vast majority of Christians will not hear, are not permitted to hear, all of John’s account of the morning of the resurrection. It became optional with the 1979 Prayer Book for Episcopalians to hear what follows Peter and the unnamed disciple, known only as the disciple Jesus loved, returned to their homes. Their reaction to the stone, the cloths, and the tomb is not the good news of Easter morning. That comes to us from the one who was still there, looking for the body of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene stands outside of the tomb, looking in. The two angels inside say to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”⁴ She doesn’t know in that moment that the Risen Lord is standing behind her, outside the tomb. She says to the angels, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him,”⁵ and turns to go. She sees him but does not recognize him. Jesus repeats the question of the

³ Matthew 28:10. My translation.

⁴ John 20:13a.

⁵ John 20:13b.

angels, “Woman, why are you weeping?” His question does not cut through her great grief. She says, “Tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”⁶ The Shepherd speaks her name, Mariam, Mary.⁷ She addresses him, “My Rabbi, my teacher.”⁸

There’s nothing here about Galilee. In John, the Risen Lord Jesus will speak to those who are gathered that very night in Jerusalem. He tells Mary, “Go to my brothers and sisters and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”⁹ The evangelist’s introduction to the story of the Word made flesh included these words, “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”¹⁰ Mary, Mariam, is no longer just his disciple,¹¹ his servant,¹² his friend.¹³ The Lord of all creation has made her and the others his sisters and brothers, children of God.

⁶ John 20:15.

⁷ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 528, n.16.

⁸ John 20:16.

⁹ John 20:17.

¹⁰ John 1:12–13.

¹¹ John 13:35.

¹² John 15:15.

¹³ Ibid.

For the record, no Episcopal priest is ever required to use the gospel lesson from John on Easter Day, but if you follow the new lectionary and choose John, it no longer gives you the choice to use the short version.

I would argue that there are no more important words in John than the message that the Risen Jesus has for Mary Magdalene, the others, and for us on the morning of the resurrection. You and I belong to Christ, to God, in this life and in the life of the world to come. Alleluia.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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