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Year C Easter Day April 17, 2022  
Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia  
Gospel of John 20:1-18

As John tells it, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb when it was still dark, and she was alone. That might not have been very wise, but we all know what it's like when we are in deep grief. Her thoughts were not logically connecting. Her focus was narrowed. Her tears were endless. She was exhausted yet her heart raced. Mary was in a garden but she did not know it, for it was still night for her in so many ways. For many reasons, Mary could not fully see.

In her state, at the sight of the open tomb, her thoughts could only come to one conclusion: Jesus's body had been stolen. With adrenaline filling her legs and this singular thought filling her mind, she ran to Peter and John knowing they would come. But when they returned to the tomb, things weren't adding up. The linen was still there. Why would thieves unwrap Jesus first? It didn't make sense. They went home, but Mary remained and she wept outside of the tomb. Jesus's body was gone. She had to find him.

When she peeked into the tomb to see for herself, she saw something that the men didn't. Arranged like the cherubim on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, one angel in white sat where Jesus's head had lain and another at the place of his feet. Did she even notice this? They spoke to her and she spoke back. Her grief seemed to keep her in a trance with her singular thought.

But then the light appeared. Maybe because her eyes were blurred with tears, she did not recognize him by sight. But her ears knew his voice when he called her by name. Her mind cleared with the realization that she stood with her Good Shepherd, and the night fell away. She could see.

Next, maybe she moved towards him. Wouldn't we? In this mysterious scene, all we know is that he rebuffs her. "Mary, do not hold on to me." We know that Thomas was allowed to touch him several days later. Why couldn't Mary? Maybe he meant it figuratively. If that's the case, then we have a clue about the message of Easter.

By telling Mary, do not hold on to me, what if Jesus was instructing her that this moment was not a time of reunion? That was not a time to remember the joys of the past. What if Jesus was telling Mary not to hold on to what once was, for what is happening now is all about the future. Jesus said, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Yes, this was about Mary's destiny, and all our destinies. In the night, Mary thought she was at an end. With the light, standing in the garden, she was the first witness to the new beginning.

We all know that God once walked with Adam and Eve in a Garden and offered them abundant life. That didn't go well. In fact, it didn't go well for a long time. Now Jesus walks with Mary in a garden and tells her not to look back because something new is happening that changes everything. Our own Bishop Porter Taylor once preached that we all have that impulse to hold on to the past and even want to return to it. He even quoted Joni Mitchell's song Woodstock, made famous by Crosby Stills & Nash. We are stardust, we are golden, but we have got to get ourselves back to the garden. (Sorry for the Easter earworm.) But the work of God through Jesus is not to return us to the Garden of Eden. Jesus is going forward, not backwards. And he calls us forward with him to a very surprising place. It's not the old garden but a bustling active city where we live in harmony

and diversity. A city called the New Jerusalem where all God's people live as one, bound together through love. A city where there is no night, the light shines always, and it is our true home. It is a place where all can see.

Back in our Gospel, Mary Magdalene's legs were filled again with adrenaline, this time not from confusion and grief but from joy and a sense of purpose. In telling Mary to go tell the others, Jesus was commissioning her as the first evangelist among his followers. In accepting the commission, Mary experienced a rebirth, a new identity in her role in the new creation. What we will see in the next Sundays of Eastertide is that so many of the resurrection appearances of Jesus are commissionings. Everyday people called to action in God's plan for this world. Jesus directs people to see and go, tell and do, to move us all towards New Jerusalem that is our true home. Here at Grace in Eastertide, we will see our own parishioners commissioned to see, go, tell and do.

So I have a dare for you on this Easter 2022. This may sound strange, but I dare you to go home, pickup a bowl or a cup and break it. Rather than just dropping it, let's be safer and turn it upside down, cover it with a towel, and gently break it up with hammer. You will have a useless pile of broken pieces at that point. Next, carefully glue them back together and cover with seams with gold or silver paint. What you will have is something that was once lovely was broken but then remade into something different but is even more beautiful.\* May it sit on your altar, mantle, windowsill or kitchen counter and visually remind you that resurrection is re-creation. When we proclaim, "Alleluia Christ is risen" we join Mary and voice a certainty: Everything broken is rising to a new creation in Christ. See, go, tell and do. Alleluia!

\*Japanese art form called Kintsukuroi or Kintsugi