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Easter Sunrise/Vigil 6:15 am April 1, 2018
Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces

What are you looking for when you come to church on an Easter morning?

What was Mary Magdalene looking for when she came into the cemetery, early, while it was still dark?

Who in their right mind comes to a cemetery in the dark?

No, in your *right* mind you don't do this. In your right mind, you might go to the cemetery on Memorial Day, or on an anniversary of a death,

But always in daylight.

Never at night. I don't care whether you are Christian, Buddhist, agnostic, it just goes against human nature to come to a cemetery at night.

Because
 there is something inside people in their *right minds*, that is afraid of a cemetery in the dark.

But Mary Magdalene was not in her right mind because she had been there, at the foot of the cross just two days earlier.

It was a trauma.
 Mary Magdalene had seen what no human being should ever have to see.

Nails driven into human flesh the hands and feet of her Teacher, Jesus, swelling in agony.

Mary Magdalene had seen blood streaming from his head where soldiers had firmly planted the sharp, skin-piercing crown of thorns.

Mary Magdalene had seen the look in the face of the OTHER Mary: Mary, Jesus' mother.

No mom should witness the death of her own child. It's a parent's deepest fear. And Mary Magdalene had stood at the cross with Mother Mary, had witnessed all the hopes for Jesus come to a brutal end.

Again I'll remind you, we have four Gospels in the Bible, four different collections of witnesses who all remember this trauma of the crucifixion a little differently.

Some people feel this makes the Bible less true. Why -, they ask, according to the Gospel of Matthew, there's an earthquake, splitting the ground, when Jesus dies.

According to the Gospel of Luke there's an earthquake only in the hearts of the witnesses of the crucifixion, as they all went away, shocked, **beating** their chests, when Jesus died.

According to three Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, there was **darkness** in the land, when Jesus died.

The Gospel of **John**, says nothing about earthquakes or darkness at the hour of Jesus' death.

Should these differences between gospels make us doubt the historical truth of the crucifixion?

No – the opposite – Ask a reporter or an investigator who has interviewed witnesses of a crime or another catastrophe.

People will remember surprisingly different things about the very same event... and when there is an earthquake happening **inside** you, because you have just watched your friend and teacher die, you may not even notice an earthquake taking place **outside** of you. You literally might not even notice.

The Gospel of John is telling the story from Mary Magdalene's point of view.

And she remembers nothing about darkness at the moment of Jesus death, but now,

On Easter morning, Mary Magdalene walks in darkness.

You see, the darkness is *inside* of her.

The one who gave her hope is buried.

The One in whose eyes, looking at her, she saw - she could be a new woman, she was loved by God...

The one who showed her all this ... she thinks, his eyes see nothing now.

The one who gave her all this, she thinks, his voice is silent now.

This one he has bowed his head in death.

His spirit is gone.

Darkness has covered the face of the earth,

And So Mary Magdalene is not in her right mind when she goes to the tomb this early morning, in the dark.

The darkness outside matches the darkness inside.

Then why does she come?

Maybe it doesn't matter why.

What matters is she came. She saw: the big stone is rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.

The darkness has lifted just enough for her to see that.

Upset and still confused, she runs to the others who loved Jesus. *"Peter! John! Something has happened."*

No one yet knew what.

Then the Gospel of John records there is a race to the tomb! Peter wins the race... but he doesn't yet understand what has happened.

There's another disciple, this mysterious "disciple whom Jesus loved" in chapter 20 verse 2... some people think this disciple is actually John, the gospel writer himself, too modest to give his own name to the story...

Others think this "disciple whom Jesus loved" is actually a way which leaves room in the story for you and for me -

You are the disciple whom Jesus loves.

I am the disciple whom Jesus loves.

And on Easter we also race to the tomb... to see - what happened?

And although we don't understand it all, some of us, like the beloved Disciple,

We see the empty tomb, – or today, we see the Easter decorated church –immediately and without hesitation, some of us, we believe - Jesus was dead, and now he’s alive.

But some of us... and some of our neighbors, and some of our family members, are more like Mary Magdalene.

So now the Gospel of John brings us back to Mary Magdalene, (John 20:11)

She is crying.

It is morning but the darkness is still inside of her.

She has seen the empty tomb, but it means nothing to her.

Maybe this is the kind of disciple some of you or your family members are. You’ve heard the Christian gospel, sure, but...

You’ve seen too much ugliness in your life. Your hopes have been too dashed too often.

You are skeptical there is a good God. That there’s a God who is all powerful

That there is a God who cares. Skeptical - that there is someone who can make you, beautiful again, and worthy of love.

And to this broken disciple, this disciple with the darkness still inside of her, here is the God of heaven and earth

Sending his Son, again.

God sends his risen son to Mary Magdalene.

Jesus’ eyes see her.

“Woman, why are you crying?”

Jesus’ voice is alive

“MARY”

Jesus calls her by name.

Go and tell the others! Jesus empowers her;

And so yet again, Jesus calls one of his disciples to become more than she ever dreamed possible,

This crying woman, you see, becomes the Apostle to the Apostles
Mary Magdalene is first Preacher of the Resurrection from Death.

She ‘s the first to tell the world, Jesus is alive! Right in the midst of her sadness she’s overcome by the news: Our God is STILL a God of power, and love, and light.

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So why have you come to church this Easter morning?

Some of you, have come because you already know and believe, you come to worship and celebrate.

Others have come even though you are afraid of the dark, you’re hoping to see light.

Some have come because you are wondering, could it be true? Is there something to this old Easter religion?

And to all of us, and to our neighbors, family and friends, all four Gospels cry out, united in this bold truth:

Jesus who was crucified & dead, is alive again.

What matters is not *why* you came,
What matters is the truth you hear now that you've arrived.

In the living Lord Jesus, God's eyes see you. God's voice speaks to you.

God has a powerful and loving design –still - for your life. No matter your age, no matter past mistakes, no matter how thin & wavering your faith might be.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ we know this:

No need to fear darkness or death,

Because the light of God is never overcome.

So, Happy Easter. Amen.