

Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday

Jesus, the Gardener

John 20:1-18

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

1Early 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. 2So 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." 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and 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. 13They 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." 14When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus 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." 16Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17Jesus 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.' " 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.



Annibale Carracci – Holy Women at Christ's Tomb
<https://www.wga.hu/html/c/carracci/annibale/2/women.html>

The tomb and its stone may have foreshadowed only death, but the gardener has reclaimed Eden for God's beloved creatures. Mary is the first recipient: Jesus speaks her name, and plants hope in her that wipes away her tears and gives her new life.

DIAGNOSIS: We Water the Ground with Our Tears

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Death Comes to Us All

There's no escaping from death. Mary knew it when she approached

Jesus' tomb. Dead is dead. When Jesus spoke those last words from the cross, nothing could have been truer about what finally becomes of life: "It is finished."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Death Feels Personal

We shed tears for the deceased for a lot of reasons. In Mary's case, death for Jesus had been sudden, violent, and it marked the end of a very promising ministry. Mary not only lost her teacher who gave her hope, she lost a future that she anticipated by following him. What she gained was the trauma and shame of his violent political death, a corrupt religious institution, and the same heavy-handed empire she'd lived with all her life.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We're Angry and Disillusioned

When you can't blame the powers-that-be because they will turn on you, and none of your community is willing to speak too loudly about the horror of your loss, the one place you might be inclined to turn is to God. The psalmists certainly didn't hesitate. Even Jesus, from the cross, used those words that speak of God's abandonment: why have you forsaken me? God was asking the same question of those who stood by when Jesus was being crucified. He is asking that question of humanity still today.



Jesus resurrected and Mary Magdalene
<http://thebiblerevival.com/clipart27.htm>

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Brings New Life from the Soil We Water

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Restoring the Garden

Such questions cannot keep the “green blade” from rising,

though. Jesus, who anticipated both his death and his resurrection, vacates the tomb only to be mistaken for the gardener. What a lovely metaphor: God-incarnate tending to the garden by bringing about new life. The tomb and its stone may have foreshadowed only death, but the gardener has reclaimed Eden for God's beloved creatures. Mary is the first recipient: Jesus speaks her name, and plants hope in her that wipes away her tears and gives her new life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Cultivating New Fruit in Us

Each time we hear Jesus speak our names, in the Word, at the font and table, we are reclaimed for resurrection life in the here and now. Tending to our faith with his promises, Jesus plants us firmly back in God's care. Weeping may come by night, but joy comes in the morning. But as much as we might like to cling to that joy, as Mary wanted to cling to Jesus, we know that our faith has places to go.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): New Fruit Produces Seeds Worth Planting

So we take the fruit of Christ's resurrection planted in us, and spread it around. We meet people on this side of the grave, with the news of an open tomb, and a gentle gardener who meets us in our sorrow with resurrection joy. We might have our questions, still we turn toward our neighbors: we reach out to those experiencing the darkness of grief, the shadow of trauma, the loneliness of abandonment. We don't have quick answers, but we do have hope in a gardener who keeps stirring up the soil of our hearts, that we might grow under his care.