

Easter Vigil

“MARY”

John 20:1-18

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Analysis by Joseph Justus van der Sabb

20Early 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.

[19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.]

Author's Note: A thought on the Confession/Absolution writ large, bent open. ... In one sense, the Confession is nothing more than saying "I am not okay." By "sin" we tend to mean instances of disobedience against God's Law. But what about the sin that is inflicted upon me? What of the grief and pain and temptation that bear me down toward death and hound my waking and sleeping? Is that the stuff with which "I have ever offended thee"? This world cuts me apart and casts me into darkness, that I know full well. Can I not "confess" that unto God? Can I not sit in judgment upon God for his world? Is there no response in Christ?

If the Confession is saying "I'm not okay! It's not okay!" then the Absolution must be nothing more than doing Christ to the person, saying: "Because of Christ, you are okay!" In the same

way that the Confession is unique to every person of every place, so too the Absolvo has many vibrant harmonies: I forgive you; open your eyes; be baptized; take and eat; repent and trust; it's me!; peace be with you; go with God.

Each liturgy could be viewed in this light-Word, Meal, Bath, Community; Christ is God's final and fully satisfying answer to our 'not-okay-ness' made present in different nuances in the liturgy.

Each Church Year can be read in this way: through the soul-searching of Lent, and the Death of God, we come to the place where all our striving has failed. The God of Triumph who we thought would save us from our world, ourselves, has absconded, failed us, fallen into death. We linger in this Vigil, grieving our loss, not daring to hope again those hopes which have been so often crushed. But then the whisper, "Mary , te absolvo." That voice!! He comes from beyond death to find me? To say my name?

With that voice still reverberating in the world, do we dare offer the Absolvo to others? Can we offer it to God? Is God, too, okay in Christ?

DIAGNOSIS: "It's all wrong!" "It's not okay!"

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *No Big Deal: the Grieving Process!*

Early, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb (v. 1) and stood weeping outside (v. 11), but the disciples returned to their homes (v. 10). Though we live in an age and place where torn clothes and deafening weeping are replaced by dabbed noses, sunglasses and an appointment with something addicting, we do know something about grief and the death of

dreams. Mary comes to do for her friend and Rabbouni what is right and fitting, what we do for all who are so crushed beneath the hand of Fate. Just a little something to smooth it over and make it smell better. We file away the memories and the hopes and the dreams into that big box labeled: "Nice try, but not gonna happen," and then we cry a little. And then we "return home" (16:32, 20:10) and move on. As best we can, anyway.

Wait... how is this a problem? She's in the inevitable "grieving process" and will soon be getting over it and moving on!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *No Big Deal: It's Just a Flesh Wound!*

Like Mary and her friends, trust in our Rabbouni is supplanted by "common sense." Around here, we take Death for granted and bow to its inevitability. Well, but who wouldn't? It's not like it's a choice between Jesus and Death... Jesus lost. He's dead. And with that, a deep denial settles over our world. Sorrow will not turn to joy, not now, not ever (16:20). God's claims are not really all that trustworthy. We've been schooled, you and me. The best that practical folk like us can do, seeing as we at least are still more or less alive, is walk back from the tombs and douse our disillusioned grief in something distracting. Best we eat, purchase something and have fun, for tomorrow we die. The symptoms of our bondage are everywhere we look and when the façade of okay-ness breaks down, we hire professionals and take expensive drugs to pick up the pieces.

THIS is what Life is all about? Does this Satisfy ANYONE in this room?

Well... no... but this is as good as it gets. If the only one who might have turned out to be trustworthy isn't, we're on our own around here. Anyway, it's probably not THAT bad... Given that Life is apparently up to me, I wrest control and make of it what I

can, in my own way, for my own ends. And yes, I'll probably fail, but I'll look good doing it! In fact, I'll fail with such style that they'll be jealous of my "failure"!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *You think there is a Deal? There isn't.*

Our foray into "knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ" (17:3) has failed on legitimate terms and we write God off. Scattering (16:32), we stumble into hellish darkness, blind and confused and obstinate... utterly alone in God's big box called, "Nice try, but not gonna happen." Peter gets this. He was right to head back to town: "Mary, come on back, give it up!" Camus said there is "but one truly serious question, and that is suicide. Is, or is not, life worth living?" Seeing no future, now that death has made this One untrustable, is Judas the only one who now walks in the shadow of death? Who's gonna forgive God for this one!?

PROGNOSIS: "I have seen the Lord...Everything is okay!"

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *I know your name! Mary!*

But Mary stays on set, weeping. She can do no other. The scene gives way to a busy drama, with stones on the move, messengers in white, a race to the tomb, bowing and touching and kneeling and then a poignant moment where the Lead Actor enters the scene with a single line: "Mary." For this woman who is undone, scattered, grieving, what more could there be to the salvation of existence than to recognize that voice when it says her name?! What else could matter? "Those who hear the voice of the Son of God will live" (5:25). The one on whom the future rested has drunk the cup of death and is back from Hell to speak her name. He speaks her name over the formless darkness and brings Life where it was not before. I baptize you, John, Joan, into my

Father's world. I seize your future and make it my own. I know you, I love you, I accept you, everything is okay. "Mary." "It is I. Peace be with you." Hearing this word, believing the One who sent him [God], we pass from death to life (5:24), we too are caught up in the Absolvo.

Behold, the Vigil Light in the face of despair. Behold, the God-Man for you.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *I know your name! Rabbouni!*

Finding ourselves met and known by the Gardener, night is as day. Where before the order of the day was participation with Death, today the light keeps shining (1:5). To hear him say: "I call you friend (15:14)" opens the tomb of her heart: "Rabbouni!" She is ready to walk a path toward other friends (20:17b). The untrustworthy and self-oriented pursuits which are intended to achieve security for me and mine in a failing world are no longer important. Instead, we grab ahold of Christ and cling for dear life (20:17) (Jesus might be uncomfortable with this, but he better get used to it... we're not going anywhere! There's nothing and nobody else that's good enough!) Here, in a garden where we have come to feel sorry for ourselves and our world, we are suddenly and unexpectedly met by the only One, the One whose breath of life (20:22) makes all things new. Our eyes are turned to him, our trust is put in him. "From here, the only way is up. The only way is with him. Hang on!"

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *C'mon, Let's Go!*

Racing from the Garden Tomb to the Upper Room, we come with glad tidings! "I have seen the Lord! (20:18)" All is not lost! All is not doom! In fact, things have never been better! Peter, James, John, taste and see! Mary, Mary and Mary, hear this Word! Though many evils abound in this world, though death and death's

children afflict our every step, though hope be dim and fanatics prevail, Christ is Risen! He is here in our midst, bringing Peace, speaking our Names, satisfying our deepest need. Behold the Body (20:19-29)!

Who will take this message from this Upper Room to the one who needs it most (20:25)? Who will love the others as he loved us (13:34, 15:12)? Who will feed the lambs (21:15)? Isn't this the joyful journey of those who are called by this name, who are fed and nourished, held and comforted? We set our faces to the world, in hope, in confidence, in joy, glad to have seen our Lord (20:20).