

The Vigil of Easter

CALLED OUT

John 20:1-18

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Analysis by Chris Repp

Early 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 towards 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 round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did

not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Trusting the god of Death

Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Running Around in the Dark*

Up before dawn, Mary is off to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. John does not say, like the Synoptic authors, that she came to anoint his body. That had already been done by another Mary (so said Jesus, back in chapter 12). Was this Mary aware of that? Had Jesus' looming death been a reality for her even then? Whether it was or not, his death is all too real now. She had seen him die, and as she encounters the opened, empty tomb she still does not question death. And so, still in darkness, she runs, searching for death, confused about where it might be found.

Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Benighted*

What is surprising about Mary's reaction to the empty tomb is that this was not the first time a tomb associated with Jesus had been emptied. Back in Bethany another Mary's brother had walked out of a tomb under his own power. Jesus had called him by name back to life. Surely this Mary knew about that. It's

what had drawn so many people to Jesus as he drew near to Jerusalem—the whole world, to hear the Pharisees tell it (12:19). And yet, confronted now by this empty tomb, she believes only in death, and the power of “them.” “They” have taken his dead body she knows not where.

Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Called Out (for Trusting Death)*

She delivers her message of trust in the power of death to the disciples, and more running around in the dark ensues. They “believe,” but only what Mary believed: that death reigns supreme, and that the corpse had merely been carried off somewhere else. They too are still in the dark. They “did not understand the scripture” that Jesus was bound to (Greek: dei) rise from the dead, and so they go back home. The light has come into the world, the darkness did not overcome it, and yet they fear, love, and trust the darkness rather than the light (see 3:19 and 1:5). At home in the dark, they are as good as dead.

PROGNOSIS: Trusting the God of Life

Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Called Out (from Death to Life)*

The light shines and the darkness is dispelled. As God first fashioned life from the dust of a garden, so now God calls forth new life from a garden tomb. (We don’t have a witness to the moment of the resurrection. But did the Father cry, “Jesus, my Son, come out!” as Jesus had called out Lazarus?) The tomb is empty not because a dead body has been moved, but because the crucified one has crossed over from death to life. But then it is not empty. A pair of angels sits at the burial site, incredulous at the weeping death-truster before them. (“They really DO love the darkness rather than the light, these humans!”) She turns and proclaims her death-faith to the gardener. (She is, after all, not entirely wrong about him being

the gardener. He was in the beginning with THE Gardener, the Word of the Gardener [to conflate the creation stories] by which all things came into being, [John 1:3].) He now changes the subject and speaks to call out life from death.

Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Enlightened*

Called by name, Mary's faith is transformed in an instant. Known by her Lord, she is no longer in the dark. Her old god has been dispelled. Enlightened, she now knows the Christ and clings to him.

Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Sent (Running with Purpose)*

This is not to be a private sort of faith, however. She is not allowed to hold Jesus to herself. She is not even allowed to cherish the moment but is instantly commissioned: "Go!" Her new faith, which has pulled her back from death's grip, must be shared with those still at home in the dark, the others who are as good as dead. Now she runs with purpose, a woman with a mission, "bearing God's creative and redeeming word" (as we say in our baptismal liturgy) to the disciples and from them to the whole world.