

## **Easter morning ends our mourning**

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert Edson, Rector, in St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on the Day of Resurrection, Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008.

*When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.* John 20:14

This account of the resurrection is at first a case of mistaken identity. What Mary Magdalene and the other disciples found on that first Easter morning was certainly not what they expected. They were in deep mourning and grief for the loss of their friend and master, the one in whom had placed all their hopes and trust. He had a profound effect on Mary whose whole life had been affected by him. Now that he was gone, Mary could barely summon the courage to return to the tomb to anoint the body with spices. Imagine her surprise when she arrived to discover that not only had the stone been removed, but the body of Jesus was gone. All that remained was the linen cloth in which he had been wrapped.

The sight of the empty tomb was a cause for both bewilderment and annoyance. It was not uncommon in those days for grave robbers to invade fresh tombs to plunder what might be there for the taking. Wondering where they had taken the body of Jesus, Mary ran to tell the others. The men, unable to believe what they heard, had to go see for themselves. Now their slow pace was set into motion as they broke into a run to see for themselves. Startling and extraordinary news quickens the adrenaline.

As they arrived breathlessly at the entrance to the tomb, they were astonished beyond words. The missing body of their friend whom they mourned was more than they could bear as they returned to their homes to break the news to others. Mary was left alone by the entrance, still weeping.

We can become so consumed with the emotions of sorrow and grief, so distracted by guilt, anger, and resentment that we cannot think of anything else. Sometimes we can become so discouraged with what we think is an impossible situation, that we simply can't see any possible solutions. We can become so distracted by disappointment and failure that we fail to see the possibilities for recovery available to us. When discouraged or sorrowful, we often look in the wrong direction, thinking only about the sadness of loss. When my wife died after a grueling long illness, I felt a terrible sense of loss and returned home from the hospital to be greeted by three men whom I had known when they lost their wives. It wasn't important what they said, but just their being there as a sign of support was so appreciated.

When we experience failure or disappointment instead of becoming paralyzed with remorse, resurrection power helps us to focus on the possibilities for finding solutions and gaining new directions. It is in God's resurrection power that we are able come back from the pain of discouragement to turn failure into victory.

Mary couldn't recognize Jesus at first because she was looking in the wrong direction. She was peering into the tomb that represents death and the end of all hope. She was thinking only of the impossibilities of death instead of the possibilities of life. She only had to see and listen to the risen Jesus standing there. When Jesus spoke her name she turned around, thinking at first he was the gardener, found her self face to face with the risen Jesus. No mistaken identity here. Imagine how startled, how surprised, how shocked she must have been to recognize the risen Christ, no longer lying dead in the tomb, but standing before her, larger than life itself.

Now Mary did not try to analyze what had happened. She did not try to come up with an explanation. She had but one emotion now. She was overjoyed at the wonderful realization that Jesus was not dead, but very much alive. All she wanted to do was to share this good news with anyone and everyone she could find!

The accounts of the resurrection are concern not only with the risen Christ, but what happened to the disciples afterward. They who had abandoned him at a time when he needed them were now the most astonished people you can imagine. Easter is the story of people being converted by the evidence of God's power overcoming the power of falsehood, evil, and death. Easter is the story of people being lifted up over the forces of oppression and depression.

As Mary's sorrow was turned into joy, the events of that Easter morning banished all sadness and mourning. Good Friday sorrow is turned into Easter joy. Crying and weeping is replaced by laughter. When we are released from the power of sin and death and are given the joy of new life in Christ, our sorrow is turned into gladness.

What is left for us now is to discover how we come to Easter faith, how the reality of the risen Jesus works in us. When you read and hear stories of people who have turned failure into success, you can sense that a greater power has been working in them. How much more we can do when we learn to cooperate with that power working in us!

While I can't tell you that I have ever seen the risen Jesus walking the street, I can tell you that I have seen his resurrection power alive and working in people I've known. I've seen the risen Christ in a child whose parents were driven to distraction because he kept getting into trouble and failing in school whose life was turned around through counseling and began to mature and through tutoring began to make sense out of so much that been so confusing to him. I have seen the risen Christ in an alcoholic husband whose wife and family had all but given up on him who gained sobriety and begin putting his life back together again. I've seen the risen Christ in an elderly person who had become preoccupied with growing old and closer to death whose life was turned around by the regenerative power of the resurrection to give her reason to live more fully again.

What happened to these people is the release of God's resurrection energy which gave them power to live as sons and daughters of God. The power of the resurrection really works in those who believe it can happen!

Easter morning ends our mourning. Praise God for what can and does happen when we believe!