

Happy Easter!

I nearly said it during the soundcheck and checked myself. Over the years, I have found it helpful to put myself in the place of different characters in the Easter story to think about how they would have experienced that first Easter morning. This morning, I'm going to speak to you in the voice of Mary Magdalene and tell her story from how I imagine it.

Though I was born over 2,000 years ago, I think I'm what you might call a small-town girl. I grew up in a tiny village in Galilee. I didn't have any big dreams of being someone important in the scheme of history. I really didn't think I mattered at all, but that was before I met him, Jesus.

Now, I know that I'm one of the privileged few to have actually known the rabbi personally while he walked the earth, and since that time, I've gained something of a reputation. People have assumed I was a prostitute, the woman who wiped Jesus' feet with her own tears and it has even been assumed maybe I was the woman caught in adultery.

I have been, for most of history, the example of the ultimate reformed sinner. Back then, I might have worried about my reputation. I might have wanted to correct the scholars and the theologians, but it's funny how little most things we think are important really matter in the light of eternity. Does it matter that people assume I'm such a great sinner? No, it doesn't. Anyway, we're all sinners, and that's why the Easter story is so incredibly powerful. That's why knowing Jesus is so important.

Even back then, when I would look into his eyes, I knew it didn't matter what I had done. It didn't matter that I was just a woman. It just didn't matter. None of it did. Jesus always looked at me, at each of us with eyes that saw beyond the things we judge ourselves on. He saw straight into my heart and loved me anyway. How does one respond to such gracious and pure love?

I think maybe Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice had it right in some sense when they put words in my mouth. I don't know how to love him. It's true. How can any of us, limited as we are, really respond to such gracious love. I couldn't. I didn't really know how. While the fantastical imagination of Dan Brown and the Da Vinci Code aside, I really was given a very special role. I am

one of the bright threads in this seamless garment of people who make up God's salvation history. Anyone can be, and everyone is called to be a thread in that most holy festal garment.

If I, Mary of Magdala, can, well, certainly then you can too. You, sitting here this morning, you are invited to play a role in salvation history with me. My most memorable moment occurred that first Easter morning. We had been so alone, so full of sorrow and despair when he died. As his followers, we were now in danger for even being associated with him. I admit, I was disappointed in Jesus then. All of us had grown frustrated, but his death, his death was just too terrible, too awful for so great a man, so nothing could have prepared me for what was to happen.

When I reached the Tomb and saw the stone was gone and the tomb was empty, it was like insult to injury. Who could've taken our Jesus? I rushed and told Peter, and then I stood there at this empty tomb, weeping, crying uncontrollably. Why would they take his battered body? We just wanted to anoint it.

I remember looking into the tomb one more time, and this time, I saw two men in white who asked me the strangest question, "Why are you crying?" As I responded, I turned and saw a man, the gardener, I guessed. Maybe he'd taken Jesus away, and so I asked him. Well, let me tell you, friends, keep your eyes open because most of us have seen the risen Christ at some point. We just didn't realize it.

I, of course, assumed he was a common gardener until I heard him say my name, "Mary." No one said my name like he did, like I was his only beloved child. Then I knew it was Jesus, alive again, not dead, just as he had predicted. My shock gave way to joy that rushed through me from head to toe, and I reached out to embrace him.

Then Jesus commissioned me. Me of all people. Can you believe that I was the first to be given the message of good news of the resurrection, the most glorious and astonishing news the world had ever heard? It wasn't one of the men. Peter had already been there and come back. It was me. It was me who was sent to preach the good news first. I was that day commissioned to be not just an apostle but an apostle to the apostles to witness to them the miracle that God had done.

Jesus and his incredible mercy in grace counted me worthy of this role. But the fact that this was my role, my great commission, really says nothing of me. It says everything about God. God chooses us, you and I, no matter what we may have done or who we are, for God's glory.

As one writer put it, God doesn't call the qualified. God qualifies the called. It's not about us. We might even think we're of no use to God, that we're inadequate, and really, that's just our pride seducing us, thinking we can somehow earn our own call based on how good or how special we are, rather than being given the honor simply because God is that gracious.

My life was never the same, and I have come to expect miracles now. Miracles are everywhere if you pay attention. Jesus' resurrection showed all of us that death has been destroyed. The power of sin and evil no longer enslave us, and forgiveness is really ours. The earth shook. God moved the rock and raised up Jesus, the promise of our own resurrection. Death is not the final word. Resurrection is not only a promise to be redeemed after death, though. Resurrection and new life are happening right now. Easter is always ringing true, and death is always giving way to new life.

I found new life the moment Jesus came into my life. I found new life again when I met him that Easter morning. I found new life when I passed from this life to the next. I will find new life once more at the resurrection when all of God's saints, all of these bright threads together arise, all of us, you and I, and I can hardly wait for it. May new life be yours this Easter because Christ, he has risen!