

Unstuck

a sermon
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Trinity Reformed Church
Easter Sunday, 2018

John 20:1-18

I believe it's important to remember that the first Easter Sunday started with tears.
That's right.

Mary Magdalene was crying.

She was crying because her once vibrant Jesus

full of love
and life
and grace
and wisdom

was now a dead Jesus,

a Jesus of broken body,
a Jesus of rotting flesh,
a Jesus who had been cruelly executed,
a Jesus who had been taken from her,
a Jesus who was no more.

So she had already been crying. Actually, ever since Jesus had first been nailed to the cross, she had been crying.

It was as if she couldn't stop crying.

She was stuck:

in her tears,
in her sorrow.

And now, she was crying because she had gone to the tomb, gone there

to pay her respects,
to place flowers,
to honor this rabbi whom most all had abandoned,
to do what needed to be done to care for his body now in deathly repose.

But when she got there, when she got to the tomb, she found it not as she had expected.

She had expected the tomb to be sealed up, closed with a large stone, to keep the decay and stench inside, to keep grave robbers and scavenging animals outside.

But the expected was not what she found. The tomb was not sealed up.

Instead it was open.

Instead, it was empty.

Nobody was there.

Or, should I say, no *body* was there.

So she started crying all the more, her imagining right away going to thoughts of grave robbers and scavenging animals, the heaping of even more injustice on her departed master.

It was as if she couldn't stop crying.

Because she was stuck: in her tears, in her sorrow.

Of course, when she went there looking for Jesus, she went there looking for the Jesus she had known.

A mortal Jesus.

A Jesus of memory.

A Jesus of history.

A Jesus that belongs, as does Mary,

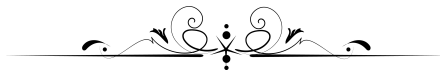
to before and after,
to cause and effect,
to the past but not to the future,
not any more,
not any longer.

Which means that here, too, she was stuck. She was stuck in that understanding of Jesus.

She was stuck in the past.

She was stuck in sorrow.

She was stuck.



Sometimes I get stuck. Do you? Yeah, I expect that at least some of you do. Stuckness is so common, and so frequent.

I'm not talking about literally being stuck. Like that time when my boys were little, and it was winter, and we were driving home, and they were arguing in the back seat, and I yelled in my Dad voice "Don't make me pull over!" and when I did, I got the car stuck in the snow on the unplowed shoulder of the road.

That's not the kind of "stuck" I mean.

Instead, I'm talking about being stuck

emotionally,
spiritually,
stuck as selves,
a stuckness of the soul.

Sometimes it's about inaction. It's about not moving forward. We get stuck in ways that make it tough to do anything constructive. We find ourselves paralyzed in our fear, incapacitated by our worry.

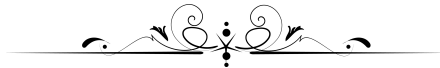
Sometimes it's not inaction, but too *much* action. It's about repetition. Our stuckness is seen in debilitating patterns of behavior that we do over

and over
and over
and over again:

the compulsive behaviors of minds and hearts dominated by death and ripped apart by envy and crushed by fear and fouled by hate.

We might point to events and circumstances outside of us that cause our stuckness. And they sure do have their impact. But really the cause finally, ultimately, most truly lies *inside* of us. Because we shout or whisper to ourselves a thousand and one words a thousand and one times a day that all amount to these lies:

“You can do nothing; you have nothing; you *are* nothing.”
And so we are stuck.



Mary was stuck. So she didn't know that it was Jesus. Not at first. It wasn't until he said her name that she knew him. And with a word, he gets her unstuck.

“Mary.”

That's what he says.

“Mary.”

And with that one word, with his uttering her name, he reveals himself to her. He gives her eyes of faith that see him as he is:

alive,
present,
full of power and life and glory,
the same and not the same,
as before and yet more,
not just resuscitated but resurrected,
not just back but greater.

And then, in a tremendous sign of his unstucking of her, Mary goes out with a task. Full of the joy that is his gift, Mary goes to tell others the good news of resurrection. She goes to tell others that he is risen.

And so, the risen Jesus turns her from a mourner into a proclaimer.

He changes her from a weeper into a declarer.

He converts her from a crier into a *preacher*.

Yes, Mary Magdalene was the first preacher. And even though some still find this uncomfortable, even though Christians for centuries ignored it and suppressed it, even though some Christians do so even to this day, it truly was women, especially *this* woman, who were

the first evangelists,
the first to proclaim the good news,
the first to tell others that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

John, “the Beloved Disciple,” who with Peter had raced to the tomb, we are told that he was the first to *believe* the good news. But Mary was the first to *proclaim* the good news, the first to declare it, the first to preach it:

he is not dead;
he is alive;
he is risen from the grave.

What a striking example of Easter unstuckness. Because women in those days, in that culture, were intentionally, systematically, kept stuck.

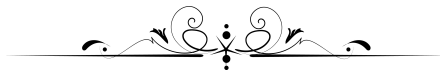
Sure, things are better today. Somewhat. They’re not perfect. And those who think things are all fine are part of the problem. There are still plenty of ways in which women are kept stuck, ways that do not apply to men.

But back then it was so thorough, this drawing of a very small circle of “a woman’s place” in which she must stay and outside of which she may not step.

Yet Jesus, the risen Christ, no longer dead but alive, encounters Mary and releases her:

from weeping, for a purpose;
from the past, for the future;
from despair, for hope;
from the expected, for the unexpected;
from sorrow, for joy;
from death, for life;

from the conventional and customary and required and enforced women’s role of silence;
for a new role of speech courageous and truthful and drenched with resurrection power.
And so he still does today.



My friends, Jesus is risen. And he speaks your name.
He speaks your name, calling you to see him not as he was but as he now is.
He speaks your name, releasing you from your inaction and your compulsivity.
He speaks your name, enabling *you* to speak words of power and new life.
He speaks your name, untying you from the bondage of the expected and the customary.
He speaks your name, setting you free from your own form of stuckness.
He speaks your name, liberating you

from the past, for the future;
from despair, for hope;
from the expected, for the unexpected;
from sorrow, for joy;
from death, for life.

He speaks your name.
Do you hear it?
Do you hear him?