

“Something to Take Home”

John 20:1-18

8 April, 2007 The First Sunday of Easter, Year C
the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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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 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.

Prayer.

Power
is the story
that proclaims the dead has returned to life.

Mary, from Galilee’s Magdala
waits ‘till Sabbath has passed
then makes her pre-dawn
trek to the tomb.
Love drove Mary to wake
and assemble

all the necessary materials
for embalming;
for turning a bloody pulp
into a cleaned, perfumed corpse
suitable for final wrapping
and dignified burial.

Love brought Mary
to Jesus and kept her by his side.
He exercised seven demons
out of Mary
and she was outcaste no more.

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Love led her to itinerate with him
 contribute to the purse
 and follow him
 through the events of this past week.
 Love brought her to the tomb ...
 but, what? lo! the stone is rolled away!
 So she runs;
 barely pausing to look in,
 too frightened to look back.

“Give them
 something to take home,”
 the old and wise homiletics professor
 lectured.
 “Give them
 something to chew on during the week.”
 “Give them
 something that will make them
 want to return next Sunday.”

It is a tall order
 for every preacher worth their weight in salt.
 So, here is my humble attempt:
 Will you love Jesus like Mary?
 Or will you love him like Peter?

Mary reported to Peter
 that the tomb was cracked
 and someone had stole his corpse.
 Off he ran,
 with Mary and the other disciple in tow
 to confirm the report of the hysterical
 woman.

Peter,
 who had been called by the sea
 dropped it all to
 come and follow him,
 the leader,
 the chosen,
 who had been present
 at transfiguration
 and in Gethsemane's grove,
 who just cut off the slave's ear
 and fled in tears,
 had just denied knowing Jesus
 1. Do you know him? No, I don't know him.

2. I thought that I saw you with him. No, it
 wasn't me.
 3. Yes, it was you. I said NO!
Cock-a-doodle-just what did you do?
 Never mind the Rock,
 the foundation upon which Christ
 promised to build his Church.
 Peter sulked,
 a guilt ridden man.

Like a splash of cold water
 youth sped them to the tomb,
 Mary, quietly,
 tearfully trailing.
 Peter pokes in
 across the open tomb's threshold,
 takes it all in
 - blood stained shroud -
 rolled and set aside,
 and he believed,
 - though we are not told what he believed -
 and promptly returned home.

Will you love Jesus like Mary?
 Or will you love him like Peter?

Then, there is Mary
 left behind,
 an open heart
 wounded,
 grief compounded
 by apparent theft.
 It is not so much
 that she finds him,
 rather,
 he is there when she turns
 startled.
 The gasp;
 the words;
 stunned,
 the realization
 the Risen Lord!

Love
 is when every cell
 desires to wrap arms
 in wonton abandon,

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but refrains
 out of respect,
 upon the command
 of the Risen Lord.
 "Go and tell ..."
 is the first commission.
 "Go and tell ..."
 becomes the sinew of faith.
 "Go and tell ..."
 reveals the love of a woman
 from Magdala in Galilee
 by her faithful obedience.

Again, I ask you:
 Will you love Jesus like Mary?
 Or will you love him like Peter?

What is more important
 than your presence here today
 is your response
 Monday morning,
 Tuesday morning,
 and each day for the rest of your life.

Will you be like Peter,
 who sees, believes, and returns
 as cold as a corpse;
 a love that has of yet,
 not matured beyond
 mere fan-boy flattery?

Or will you be like Mary,
 who see, believes,
 and heeds his command:
 to go and tell the world
 to go and tell the world
 that our Messiah is Risen!
 Jesus has won victory over the grave!
 Christ has secured for us eternal life!
 Where now, Oh, death
 is thy sting?

The Love of a generous Heavenly Father
 who gave his Son
 not to condemn the world to a cold grave
 but to save the world through
 resurrection's empty tomb

is the same love that
 gives life to Mary's actions.
 That same love is delivered unto you
 this Easter morning
 in the reading
 and in the hearing
 of this Word from John.
 So,
 where are you going to take it?
 what are you going to do with it?
 How will his love for you
 change you Monday morning?

Will you love like Peter?
 Or, will you love like Mary?

This is the word of the Lord
 as it has come to me.
 Thanks be to God. Amen.

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