

Easter Day

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Introduction

The Easter story is full of conflict and contradiction. The Gospel accounts differ in their details and their depiction of the characters. However, one thing is clear – Christ has risen. In this account, Mary Magdalene is the first person to discover the empty tomb, although she does not understand its significance. She is concerned that Jesus' remains have been stolen from the tomb or moved for some reason. Realising that she cannot deal with this on her own, she runs to tell Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Perhaps together they can work out this mystery.

Yet, as soon as she tells them, they run to the very place they have been told Jesus will not be found. As you read through this excerpt from the Easter Day passage, consider how Mary Magdalene felt to be doubted. Have there been times in your life when you have needed to see something for yourself in order to accept it? Have you dismissed someone else's information and feelings as you sought proof? How would Mary Magdalene recount the events of this day?

Text

John 20:1-10 (11-18)

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. So 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.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Comment

You wouldn't believe the kind of day I've had! I couldn't sleep last night, tossing and turning all night long. Each time I woke up, I thought it had just been a bad dream. Jesus wasn't really dead at all. In the morning, I'd get up and find out what adventure we'd be going on today. But I awoke to the nightmare truth that it is real. He is dead. Gone. Murdered. I don't understand people who talk about crying themselves to sleep. I cried so hard I could barely breathe never mind sleep.

It was still dark when I finally gave in and got out of bed. I didn't know what to do or where to go so I went to the only place I wanted to be – even if being beside Jesus meant sitting outside his resting place. Only, when I got there, I was able to go right into the tomb because someone had moved the stone. At first I was happy – it meant I could get closer to him, although it wouldn't really be him anymore, not without that magnetic personality and his words of comfort and challenge. I can't believe I have to live the rest of my life without him. Then I realised that the tomb was empty. Empty. Nobody there, except me. On my own. All alone. The tears started again and it took a minute for the panic to set in. Where was his body? I did that thing you do when you've lost something. I checked everywhere, even places in that tomb that were too small to fit a body. I picked up the cloths and looked under them. I mean, what was I thinking? It felt like I had lost him or mislaid him somewhere.

Then the dread set in and the wailing and the fear. I almost passed out. Someone had stolen his body. Was it not enough that he had been stolen from me already? I got angry. Was it the Sanhedrin? Was it the Romans? Had the disciples stolen him from under my nose? They were always leaving me out. They'd probably moved him somewhere else to protect him and didn't even bother to tell me.

Anger moved my feet and before I knew it, I was knocking on the door and asking Peter and that other guy why they had done it. They acted all innocent so I shouted at them, "What did you do with the body? I know it was you. Tell me where he is!" They laughed at me, the wild woman on the doorstep. Then they saw my tear-stained face and the distress in my eyes. I told them what I had found. They didn't believe me. How could they think I'd lie about something so important? I was so hurt and disappointed. I felt so alone in that moment. I couldn't even look at them anymore. When I told them again, my head was hanging low and exhaustion set in. Something changed then...they said they wouldn't believe it unless they saw it for themselves. They ran off like typical boys. Racing each other, as if there was nothing wrong. "Last one there's a rotten fish!" That was the last thing I heard Peter shout, as I collapsed in a heap.

They weren't running when they came back. They were walking together but neither of them said a word. Shock, I suppose, may even a little wonder. Now they knew that I was telling the truth, but do you think I got an apology? No chance. They didn't even have an answer about where the body was now. Useless.

I'm on my way back to the tomb now. I don't know why but I feel drawn there. He never doubted me. He never ridiculed me. He included me. I want to feel close to him.

Response

· Look at artistic representations of the empty tomb. As you look at them, consider the places where you feel closest to Jesus.

· The disciples sought evidence that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb. Imagine that you are a detective. What evidence would you seek? Who would you want to interview?

Prayer

O Lord, I tried to follow you
when you walked in the valley of the shadow of death
but I lost you.
Sometimes it feels like you've been stolen away from me.
Jesus, reassure me that you're still here.
Tell me that I'll never be lost to you.
Bring me home.

Amen.