

Sermon, Easter Sunday 2017, St. David's Episcopal Church John 20:1-18 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

This Easter morning story is so familiar, especially this version from the Gospel of John. Because it's so familiar, it can be challenging to really hear, especially to hear the details.

Like that one. "But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb."

Hey Mary Magdalene! It's Easter Sunday! Today is all about joy and resurrection and fulfillment of God's promises. Why are you weeping?

Peter and the other male disciple aren't standing around weeping. They ran to the tomb, saw that it was empty, and then went home. Mary, meanwhile, who had run to get them, is just standing there. Weeping.

We have a marvelous model in Mary Magdalene. Sometimes some call her a reformed prostitute, but that's not biblical. That's something some cleric made up hundreds of years later. What we know about Mary Magdalene from the Bible is that she was once possessed by demons, that she traveled with Jesus, and that unlike most of the male disciples, she didn't flee when Christ was crucified. Mary was right there, watching. Her face was probably one of the last he saw before he died on the cross.

Mary Magdalene showed up that Easter Sunday morning, while it was still dark; and she saw that the stone to the tomb had been removed.

Easter Sunday is the most important Sunday to show up at church. Good for all of you for showing up. Seriously. Celebrating the resurrection is essential to our Christian faith.

And as Christians, we are called to wholeness. This means a whole range of emotions. Including grief. Weeping. Like Mary Magdalene outside the tomb.

Do you feel a whole range of emotions? Especially on a day like today?

Our culture doesn't always encourage this, especially not on special days like Easter. Our culture doesn't encourage just standing there and weeping. Instead, we feel pressure to act certain ways on certain days. We feel pressure to respond to every call, every text, every email, every social media notification. We are constantly stimulated. Our attention spans are decreasing. We don't have time to figure out what we're feeling, because we're too busy reacting.

Mary Magdalene wanted to be at the tomb at first light, but she found something she did not expect: the stone removed. She reacted. She ran. The disciples reacted, and ran. And went home.

And then Mary stood there weeping.

With Easter, sometimes we are so caught up in Christ defeating death that we skip over that death still exists. That darkness still exists. That before the resurrection, Christ was really dead; and that as humans, we all will die someday. We remember that part on Ash Wednesday, but we want to skip that part on Easter Sunday. Don't talk about death—let's talk about life!

Resurrection! Skip to the good stuff!

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

She was grieving.

Do you let yourself grieve?

As the rector here, I know some of your griefs, but there are many I don't know about. I might know that you recently lost a loved one, or are facing divorce, or lost a job; but I might not know about a dream you're grieving. About something small that didn't turn out the way you wanted. Maybe you are trying not to think about it. Because it's Easter Sunday!

Remember, we are called to wholeness. Which means a whole range of emotion.

Pixar came out with a movie called *Inside Out* a couple years ago, that tells the story of a family, but also a story about the emotions inside the head of one of the family members, a girl named Riley. She has Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust.

Riley comes to learn that when Sadness is suppressed, Joy gets lost, and Fear, Anger and Disgust take over: and things don't go well.

At least, not until Sadness gets to have a voice.

When Mary first came to the tomb, while it was still dark, she must have been terrified. She ran, and disciples ran; it was all very frantic. Frenetic.

But finally, she stood there, weeping.

She had cried past fear, and sadness took over. Sadness that this teacher was gone. His teachings were over. Such violence and hatred had been displayed. He suffered, while she watched.

That is a horrible, horrible thing. Have you had to watch someone you love suffer? It feels unbearable.

But she bore it, on Good Friday. And now, she just stands there and weeps. She bends over in her weeping, looks again into the open tomb—and then: angels.

Why are you weeping? The angels ask.

They don't say, stop crying, Mary. They don't say, be strong, hold it in, get it together.

They ask why she's weeping. Woman, why are you weeping?

She tells them. She turns around: and there's Jesus. He asks the same question. But she doesn't recognize him until he says her name.

Mary!

Mary. A whole person, with a range of emotions, who allowed herself to experience them. And now her sorrow, her grief, is transformed into utter awe.

The dead man she was just grieving is standing in front of her. Alive. She watched him suffer a horrible death, and here he is, resurrected.

Mary is the first person to witness the resurrected Christ.

Would she have seen him if she'd gone home, as the others did? Probably. He did seek the others out that evening, so that they saw him too, all but Thomas, who wasn't with them.

But as we'll see next week, when we hear about Thomas, the others were locked inside that same night. Scared.

Their fear was getting in the way of their grief.

But Mary Magdalene allowed herself to stop and wallow in it.

Easter is not about Mary Magdalene. Easter is about Jesus Christ being raised from the dead. About how he loves all of us. About how God as three persons loves us all more than we can fathom. Death was defeated, and we are forever changed. Resurrection is the last word.

But everything is not perfect. We are still human. We will still die. Everything is not fixed. But that's not the last word.

Easter is all about Jesus, but Mary Magdalene can help us learn how to become the best Christians we can. When we allow ourselves to be fully present to all parts of ourselves, to all of our feelings; when we give ourselves at least a moment to stop and wallow in it: then we can allow Christ in, and fully experience resurrection.

It's Easter Sunday, but for some of us, it's the first Easter Sunday without someone we love. Here at St. David's, we remember members of our community who aren't here on Easter for the first time. It's sad. We're grieving.

It's Easter Sunday here at St. David's, but we are also facing the last month of our beloved preschool. By the time Pentecost comes, the last preschool class will have graduated. I don't know what happens next. I do know that none of us wanted the preschool to close. Last week, I washed the feet of our preschoolers for the last time, and it was all I could do not to cry.

I need to let myself cry. We all do. We are going to miss this. None of us wanted the preschool to close.

We need to give ourselves room to grieve, before we completely figure out what's next. We want to rush to fix this, but we need to let ourselves grieve.

There will be some sort of resurrection. St. David's will find a way to use this space to serve the community in a different way, and it will be a way that glorifies God. We believe in the promise of resurrection. We know this story. We know what comes next in this story; but still, we need to pay attention to the part where Mary stood there, weeping.

Only then we will hear Jesus say our name.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.