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HOPE

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene John 20:11-18

11 Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb 12 and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 “Woman, why are you crying?” they asked her. She answered, “They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!” 14 Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 “Woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who is it that you are looking for?” She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, “If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (This means “Teacher.”) 17 “Do not hold on to me,” Jesus told her, “because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God.” 18 So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.

Mary Magdalene visited Jesus’s tomb in the early morning, while it was still dark. It was dark in Mary’s mind at that moment, too, because she didn’t know that the light would soon appear to her. She saw that the tomb was empty and went to inform Simon Peter and John that the Lord had been taken from the tomb, saying: “We don’t know where they have put him!” It is interesting to notice that although the passage suggests that Mary had gone to the tomb alone, she said “We don’t know”. In the parallel passages of the Gospels according to Matthew (27:56) and Mark (15:40), Mary Magdalene is accompanied by Salome and Mary, the mother of James, while in Luke (24:10) she is with Joanna and Mary, the mother of James. John only mentions Mary Magdalene, but in verse 20.2 Mary says, “*we* don’t know,” suggesting that she might have been accompanied by others. In any case, whether she was alone or not, the disciples didn’t believe what she told them (she was of low status and the words of women did not carry authority) and they hurried to check the tomb for themselves. But when they saw that the Lord really wasn’t there, they went back home. They left her alone weeping outside, and neither Peter nor the disciples offered any words of comfort or encouragement to Mary.

So Mary weeps alone outside the tomb. She is so sad that she does not even consider the possibility that Jesus might have risen from the dead. She concludes, logically enough, that someone has taken Jesus' body from the tomb. Perhaps it was the authorities visiting one further indignity on Jesus. Perhaps it was grave robbers. Imagine the emotional impact of finding the grave of a loved one desecrated. Mary has been grieving; now she is shocked and horrified.

But the hope of finding the Lord was in her soul.

12 and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet.

1. So, why did the angels appear to Mary and not to Peter and John?

During his earthly life, Jesus only talked about his resurrection with his disciples, although they either didn't understand the meaning of what he told them or, perhaps, didn't remember what he had said. The Lord never talked about his resurrection with the women who followed him almost all the time, nor did he tell Mary Magdalene about it. She is now grieving not only for her big loss but also for the loss of the body of Jesus. In this situation the angels, who know about her biggest grief, appear to comfort her and to make her firmer in her readiness to meeting with the risen Jesus. And their white dresses show the lightness and splendor of the Lord's resurrection and glory.

14 Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus.

15 "Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

2. Who was Mary for Jesus?

Mary is the first person to whom Jesus appears after his resurrection . She is not a particularly prominent person in the Gospels, yet Jesus appears first to her rather than to any of the outstanding leaders among the disciples. Over the ages, Jesus reveals his presence and love especially to those who are "least". God's special people are the unknown – those who, like Mary in her grief, maintain a steadfast love for their Lord.

We know few details of Mary's life. She was apparently from Magdala in Galilee and was an early follower of Jesus. Her life was dramatically changed by Jesus when he released her from demons. She travelled with Jesus and the disciples and helped meet the practical needs of the group. During Jesus' crucifixion, when many of the disciples were not to be found, she was one of the few courageous ones who stayed at the foot of the cross. She was also one of the women who wanted to make sure Jesus had a proper burial.

Some have suggested that since the twelve disciples were all men, Jesus must not have considered women very important to his ministry. But the role of Mary Magdalene and other women who followed Jesus shows that this was definitely not the case. Jesus treated women in a manner far beyond the cultural expectation of the day, respecting them fully as people and considering them a necessary part of his ministry.

We may identify with Mary Magdalene either as a woman or as one who has been delivered from a life of total bondage. She was an outcast in society, a woman of ill repute, and Jesus appeared to her in the guise of a gardener (“She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him”), because in that society the gardeners were of low status. It is interesting that when Mary saw Jesus she didn’t recognize him, she recognized him only by his voice: (“16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” This means “Teacher.”)” About this point, Saint John Chrysostom said that Jesus opened the big mystery to her when he wanted to, and that in general he announced his presence not by appearance, but by speaking. So he speaks to challenge he was dead when he is alive.

3. Why does Jesus appear to Mary?

There are different opinions about this and one of them seems rather funny. One of the fathers of the Armenian Church in XIV century, Saint Grigor Tatevatsi, proposes ten opinions, of which the third and fourth are: “Because they (women) have weak nature, this is why He made firm the weak ones and then perfect once” and “Because they (women) like to go and announce about something”.

In the Old Testament Eve, the first woman, was cursed by God as a sinner. In New Testament the role of women changed due to Saint Mary, so two man was purified. And finally by the risen Jesus's appearance to Mary, the nature of woman is renewed and estimated and women are given the hope of a life in God’s kingdom.

4. What does Jesus give us all by appearing to Mary? What is the message for us?

18 “So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her”.

Through Mary we were given a resurrection of hope in Christ, which lives in us throughout our lives. But that HOPE WOULD NOT BE RESURRECTED WITHOUT WORK.

I would like to share an example of the resurrection of hope in my country. In 1915 the Armenian People had to endure the Crucifixion and to pass through the terrible Genocide, when more than 1.5 million Armenians were martyred in their historical land. The hope of resurrection in Christ was given to the Paralipomena of the same people in a small part of north east part of Armenia not only to survive, but to create an independent State the Republic of Armenia on 28 May 1918. A few days ago, we celebrated the 100th Anniversary of that event. Yet after just 2 years of independence, Armenia came under the Soviet communist atheist regime for a period lasting more than 70 years. Looking at the political situation of the world and the military power of Soviet Union, there was no logical hope of salvation from that regime. But for almost 70 years the hope of resurrection in Christ was present in the peoples' hearts and in 1991 freedom came once again to my country and an independent state was established in Armenia. Once again, however, it was short lived and this time an Armenian totalitarian regime was established there. Only the hope of resurrection in Christ helped the people in Armenia. We all had hope for new life and all believed that one day God would deliver us. And because the people believed and hoped, they made their first step towards refusing this regime not by fighting and violence, but by loving each other and by hearing God's will. So we should keep hoping in Christ by working, by doing our part and extending our hand to our brothers and sisters.

Yes, the hope can be resurrected in Christ and for this hope our Christian brothers and sisters in Syria and the Middle East have suffered a lot in the last years and their martyrdom is continuing. They hope for resurrection in Christ. We pray for them.

Today we are in Serbia and we see many destroyed bridges along the Danube River. The foundations of one bridges are visible on one side of the river. The bridge is a symbol of hope which links us with life and future. Europe should extend its hand to Serbia to re-establish, re-construct these bridges. Europe should give life to hope of Serbia BY WORK.

We also as CEC, we should extend our hands to other border of river, to re-establish destroyed bridges between us and between those Churches who have left us over the last few years (I mean the Churches of Bulgaria, Georgia and Russia) and by our love and respect let our brothers and sisters on the other side of the river accept our extended hands. With this kind of work, hope could be resurrected.

When we look at the geography of CEC, we see the whole of Christian Europe. A major part of Christian Europe is the Catholic world. For comprehensible reasons the

Catholic Church is not a member of CEC, but we understand that our challenges today can be overcome only through united activity. Carta Ecumenica, and the Ecumenical encounters of Basel, Graz and Sibiu, were the best impulses so far for this cooperation. So we must take responsibility for continuing the RESURRECTION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH UNITY IN EUROPE.

I want to finish by quoting a passage from Catholicos Aram I: "The church is essentially a community of faith built on Jesus Christ. The church... does not exist outside of our lives, our thoughts and our concerns. We are the church, the people of God, united in Christ and joined together with the bond of love and supported by a common hope".