

## Easter Sunday, Cycle B

Mark 16:1-7 and John 20:1-9

I have just finished a six-month slog. My workload at my job was insanely large and the professional development program I am in ate up all my free time. Add in some emotional stressors, including the pandemic, and the fact that my husband's workload was likewise over-the-top. My brain was constantly running; it woke me repeatedly in the night. My creativity shriveled. I grew cranky, emotional and achy. I kept asking God for help, but was too busy to hear any replies. Now it is done; everything has been reset to normal speed – and I am at a loss. I need to relearn how to relax, to pray, to sleep through the night, to play. It has been two weeks and I still do not have the hang of it. How do I admire the budding trees and hear God's voice again?

This example demonstrates how strange Easter can be for many of us. We are get Good Friday: we know all about suffering! We know loneliness, pain, humiliation, grief and longing. We can sit with Jesus' suffering on Good Friday for hours, even admire it – but Easter? What's that got to do with us?

Don't get me wrong: we all love a happy ending, but what do we do with it? Both Easter gospels, whether we read Mark at the Easter Vigil or John on Easter Sunday, show people who cannot grasp what has happened. In Mark, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome continue their faithful care of their beloved master and friend. As they stayed with Jesus through his crucifixion and death, they show up to help with the burial. They are good people doing good deeds, so regularly it does not even require thought. They must have heard Jesus talk about the resurrection, yet it did not register. When the angel's words penetrate – "He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him" – the women respond with panic: "They went out and fled from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid" (16:8) That's right: they fled and said nothing! Obviously, they eventually did, but these faithful women needed to grow into the idea of resurrection. God does *what* for us? There is more to us than our pain?

In the Easter gospel from John, Mary Magdala comes to the tomb "while it is still dark." In John, darkness symbolizes disbelief and Mary is still caught in it. It makes her misinterpret the empty tomb as a grave-robbing, which is what early Christian detractors claimed had happened to Jesus' body. After our passage, Mary cannot stop weeping to see clearly even when two angels and Jesus himself speak to her. They all ask, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Sorrow only gets us so far; there comes a time to realize we can live. Jesus brings Mary to that point by saying her name; Jesus calls each of us by name, giving us the love we need to live. When Mary recognizes Jesus, she calls him "Rabbouni" (or teacher), but he tells her not to cling to him. Mary was holding onto the Jesus she knew<sup>1</sup>, but Jesus is more than a really good guy to admire or even imitate. Jesus is also more than an impressive, but disconnected deity. Rather, Jesus, i.e. God, wants a deeper relationship with us. So, in both Easter stories, God is incredibly patient. God lets the women take the time they need to be able to announce the resurrection. (After all, Mark does not say someone else had to fill in for them.) Jesus does not leave Mary weeping endlessly because she failed to understand the empty tomb. Instead, God invites them to understand God better. That is what loving relationships are all about! That is what the resurrection is about!

How can we show that we are people of the resurrection? First off, we must tune into God in each moment. Enjoy raindrops running down a window or light behind a budding maple. Notice the warmth in another's gaze. It also means being gentle about returning to "normal" as the vaccine rates rise. Let us live what we learned in our pandemic bubbles. Let us actually treasure each other by continuing to wear masks and minimize the size of our gatherings. Let us insist on selflessness, kind words and dignity for all. Lastly, let us play and rest enough so that we can hear Jesus calling us by name.

- ❖ Where is your focus these days, on all that's going wrong or all that's going right?
- ❖ Give yourself time to relax with God. Admire something beautiful in nature and see what happens.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis J. Moloney, SDB. "John" in the *Paulist Biblical Commentary*, Paulist Press, 2018, p. 1178.