

Mary's Faith?  
John 20:1-18

CHRIST HAS RISEN! HE HAS RISEN INDEED, ALLELUIA!! Today is the Highest Holy day we have in our church year. We celebrate with an early worship, Easter egg hunts and candy. So, why does this early morning scriptures take us back to the sorrow of Friday night? Mary Magdalene, a faithful follower of Jesus should be celebrating that Jesus' words came true; he didn't stay dead! However, Mary seems to be questioning and doubting. How can a person, like Mary, be filled such deep faith and doubt that Jesus didn't stay dead? I believe the answer is humanness can lead us to doubt instead of faith. Even Jesus, hanging from the cross cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Doubt and faith go hand in hand just like sorrow and joy. How can you understand faith if you have never experienced doubt? I believe faith arrives once doubts have been overshadowed with great unexplainable joy. John has given us a wonderful image of how faith transforms doubts. Let's listen as we join Mary Magdalene in the garden.

It's early in the morning. The sun hasn't quite brought light to the night sky. Tears of sorrow and weary souls have taken over the Passover celebration for those who came to see Jesus. He was to be the next great king, wonderful counselor, and prince of peace, but he brutally died on the

cross. Fear led Jesus' followers into hiding because they did not want to be the next ones crucified. Mary awakens early to go to the garden in hopes of completing the preparation of Jesus' body for burial. Everything was so rushed that the Jewish customs for burial could not have been properly completed. Mary arrives at Jesus' tomb and notices that the stone has been removed from the door. Quickly she runs to find Peter and the other disciples telling them someone has taken Jesus.

Then, Peter and one other Disciple follow, look inside, and leave without speaking a word to Mary. Afraid of what she might find, Mary courageously looks inside to find an empty tomb. The mystery of Jesus' words, "I will die and rise again" is beginning to the minds of Peter and the other Disciple thinking about Jesus' last few days with them, but Mary is left to her sorrow. Her faith has been shattered. She wanders in the garden. A crushed faith often can leave a person feeling alone. In today's world we are often taught to keep our emotions secret. "No one wants to see you cry," is a statement used to imply that tears make one weak causing us to doubt or second guess. Faith is meant to keep us strong. The good news is even shattered faith and lots of tears can keep us strong. How? I'm glad you asked.

There is a story in Mark where Jesus is speaking with the father of a son who has been demon possessed since childhood. The father says to Jesus, "If you can, please help us." I love Jesus' reply, "If, I can? Everything is possible for those who believes." The father then prays, "I do believe, help my unbelief." I don't believe faith comes as an amount that we store up and then is replenished when we come to worship. Faith is knowing when to turn to God and pray, "I believe, help my unbelief." Mary's faith may have been shattered by watching Jesus die and then seeing the empty tomb, but she still had faith. It may have been in a million pieces all over the floor, but it was still her faith. It was this faith that opened her eyes when the person she thought was the gardener spoke her name.

As Mary walked away from the empty tomb, she saw a man walking into the garden. Out of her love and concern for Jesus, Mary went to this man, expecting him to be the gardener and asked where he had taken Jesus. Mary needed to see her friend and leader one more time to say goodbye. The man, concerned for Mary, asked, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Once again she pleaded for Jesus' body, but the "gardener" spoke her name and was mystically transformed into Jesus. Mary's shattered, broken, faith had transformed her doubts

opening her eyes to see Jesus was alive! Even the strongest Christians can have doubts and questions. Our task as Christians is to find those whose faith has been shattered into millions of pieces. Once we find them, our ministry is to remind them that God loves them just as they are broken, wounded, and faithful people. But wait, there's more.

While Mary was ready to once again following Jesus, she was warned, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father." In other words, Jesus didn't come back so people could physically follow him again. Jesus appeared to Mary to remind her that her small faith could still overpower her doubts. Jesus did more than pick up the pieces of Mary's faith. Jesus taught Mary that even a sliver of faith is enough. "I believe, help my unbelief" is the prayer for you and me. I admit there are times in my life that once in a while I need to be reminded of this prayer. My doubts grab a hold of my soul and I feel like Mary as she leaves the tomb. My heart is heavy with fear and sadness about what the future holds. I admit, I don't understand how God can allow certain things to happen. For me, tears sometimes help me cleanse my heart, mind, and soul of the doubts. My tears are often a signal that I need to pray, "God, I believe, help my unbelief." Then, somehow, God reminds me that God has all the answers

and I all I need is the tiniest bit of faith. Mary had only thought she lost her faith, it was there all the time.

A shattered faith is still faith but in smaller pieces. I believe as Christians we are to take these shards and share them with others who have no faith at all. I like to think that after Mary reclaimed her faith, she ran to share those broken pieces of her faith with the Disciples. Who are the people of Denison and Crawford County who, like Mary, needs to know God loves them? Is it you? In the midst of depression, mental instability, economic depression, etc, God still loves you!!! It is the reason that CHRIST IS ALIVE!! If you are struggling with faith, know that the meal that is set before is God saying, "In your brokenness, fear, and joy, I LOVE YOU THIS MUCH!!" Fears and doubts will come and go, but Christ is eternal. Have faith the size of a mustard seed and God will help you move a mountain. Share this faith in God by reminding yourself and other God loves you this much. Amen.