

St. Giles' Episcopal Church
Easter Sunday 2011
John 20:1-18
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

This is a small reproduction of an icon of St. Mary Magdalene written by Sister Ellen Francis of the Episcopal religious Order of St. Helena. Mary Magdalene has been revered through the centuries in both the Eastern and Western Christian Church. She has been called “the apostle to the apostles” because of what was recorded in the gospel we just heard: Jesus sent her to tell “the brothers,” the male disciples, that he had risen from the dead and was ascending to God.

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus dearly. She followed him all the way to the cross. To be at the foot of the cross was a dangerous place to be. Think of the violence and unrest, the terror there. Mary Magdalene risked her safety, perhaps her life, to stand at the cross with Jesus' mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Surely her heart was breaking to see her beloved Lord suffer so terribly, the innocent victim of evil.

Jesus died on Friday afternoon. Joseph of Arimathea had given a tomb for Jesus' burial, a tomb carved out of rock. Jesus' body was placed in the tomb on Friday before sunset. Then Joseph and all the Jewish disciples of Jesus kept the Passover from Friday evening through Saturday. They could not attend to the dead during the feast of Passover.

Mary Magdalene, full of grief and of love, went to the tomb of her Lord as soon as she could. The gospel says that it was so early on Easter morning that it was still dark. She knew that Jesus had been laid in the tomb, and she knew that a rock must have been placed at the entrance of the tomb. But when she arrived, the stone had been removed.

She was frantic because she was sure that someone had taken Jesus' body out of the tomb. His body was all that was left of her Lord. To be with his body was the only service she could offer him, the only consolation left to her.

So Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, to tell them the dreadful news that Jesus' body was gone. The men went to the tomb and saw that Mary Magdalene was right. The body was gone. They did not understand what had happened. The men returned home.

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus dearly. The empty tomb was the last place her Lord's body had been. She remained at the tomb, weeping. Love held her. So she was there to see the angels who were sitting in the tomb where Jesus' body had been lying. They asked her why she was weeping, and she told them. Mary Magdalene saw two angels in white in the tomb, and even their astonishing presence did not distract her from her consuming desire to find Jesus.

There by the tomb, Mary Magdalene turned from the angels and saw a man. It was Jesus, but she did not recognize him. Perhaps her eyes were dazzled by the brightness of the angels or clouded and blurred by her tears of grief. The man asked her "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Perhaps he was the gardener and knew something about the removal of Jesus' body. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

"Mary!"

The risen Christ called her name, and she knew him. "Teacher!" Love for Jesus had led her step by step to follow him, to the cross, to the tomb, to the place where Jesus called her name. Mary Magdalene saw Jesus alive and heard his message: Jesus, who

had come from the Father, was going to the Father. Death itself had not prevented the fulfillment of God's promise. And Jesus sent Mary Magdalene to share this Good News.

This morning we gather to worship God and praise God for the Resurrection of Jesus and to thank God for Mary Magdalene and all the people through the centuries and to this day who have been witnesses of the risen Lord.

For us the resurrection of Jesus is a mystery of faith. We have not seen the risen body of our Lord, as Mary Magdalene and several other disciples did. We know that in the resurrection God did something new. The resurrection of Jesus was not the resuscitation of a corpse. The gospels record that Jesus raised the dead during his ministry – a young girl, the son of the widow of Nain, and his friend Lazarus. These three people had died and were brought back to life. But they died again. Jesus was raised from death to eternal life in community with God. Eternal life with God. Life filled with the power of God's love.

In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead God did something new. We proclaim the resurrection and we are waiting for more. As St. Paul said in his letter to the Christians in Rome, we wait "in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?" (Romans 8:20-24).

Today we join the great company of people who for two thousand years have proclaimed over all the earth the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. We

proclaim the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. We wait in hope to be raised up ourselves to new life in God.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with such love of our Lord Jesus Christ that we will be led, as Mary Magdalene was, to the place where the risen Lord will call us by name, and send us out to share the Good News with God's people. Amen.