

**Pastoral Reflection**  
**Easter Sunday – Cathy Hartrich**

Jn 20:1-9

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.” So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

Join me in your imagination as we tag along behind Mary of Magdala as she swiftly makes her way to the tomb of Jesus in the dark of night. As you know, Mary didn’t sleep a wink that night, most likely tossing and turning, replaying in her mind the past two day’s events. Her beloved, her dearest Messiah, was ripped away from her life’s journey drastically, amidst torture, humiliation and the most horrible kind of execution. Mary felt herself entwined with Jesus in his last hours, wishing it were her and not him, the spotless lamb led to slaughter.

Yes, before dawn, which in the Springtime probably means 4-5 a.m. at the very latest, Mary went ahead of the other women to the place where Jesus lay. Upon arrival at the tomb, she didn’t need a guard to roll back the heavy stone, for the tomb was open!

But why Mary? Why in the dark? And what was she going to the tomb for?

Why Mary? This is a very important question to ask.

Remember that most of the male disciples of Jesus fled immediately from the scene of the execution for fear of the same fate. Two days after the initial burial, the women were left to go to the tomb for the final anointing. They were considered less threatening to the authorities and were unlikely candidates for arrest.

Also, the keepers of the permanent narratives we have to this day, we call the gospels, were men. The men were the documentarians of this remarkable event. Coincidentally, they chose to include this story of a meager woman as the first witness to the resurrection. It’s highly unusual that the testimony of women would be considered reliable and it is therefore significant. During the New Testament times women’s testimonies in court were not considered legitimate. But the narrators of the gospels decided to adhere to the truth of the record. They chose Mary over Peter and John who followed later to the tomb. The fact that they chose a female witness as the first to find the empty tomb strengthens the truth and reliability of the resurrection. If the writers of the

gospels had invented the story of the resurrection (if the body had been stolen) as many skeptics claimed, they would not have chosen a woman to be the first one to the tomb.

Why in the dark?

Mary and the other women went in the dark to escape notice. So much drama around this execution... who needs to draw any more attention in the midst of certain exhaustion?! The “media circus” needed a chance to die down. Nighttime also provided the women an opportunity for reverence and intimacy... quiet time to be alone with their most precious love.

What was Mary going to the tomb for?

As Luke and Mark report in their gospel accounts, the women went to the tomb with spices to finish anointing Jesus’ body, which had been cut short after his execution due to the impending Sabbath. Then, no “work,” not even anointing, was allowed according to orthodox Judaism. And no one, not the disciples, including the women, imagined that Jesus had actually risen. So bringing spices to complete the anointing of Jesus’ body was the logical thing to do in that moment of time. In Jesus’ day it was tradition to wash the body and anoint it with expensive perfumes, like nard, myrrh, and aloes. Just as we all love, we all grieve and need to take time to care for and honor our dead. Anointing of the dead was a common ritual that provided this opportunity. After Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross it was wrapped in a shroud, “the burial cloths.” These included a special cloth to cover the face and strips of cloth binding the hands and feet. But we are told that this part of Jesus’ anointing had been completed since the shroud of Jesus had been left behind in the tomb. The intended ultimate consecration of Jesus’ body with spices was the women’s task at hand this morning.

What are we left with in this amazing story of one disciple’s actions?

Mary was the unexpected witness to the resurrection. God entrusted her as a witness, in spite of her “illegitimacy” as a woman. We too need to be willing to respond to whatever act we are called upon to take, however large or small and leave it to God to bring about results.

Mary, in spite of not knowing that Jesus had risen from the dead, took the risk during the dark of night to be faithful and loving to the end. She lived in the moment, just as we are called to do, regarded others and their consequences as highly as she regarded herself.

Mary too, not knowing that Jesus had actually risen from the dead, intended to complete this anointing as a small act of loving kindness no matter what the result might be. May we also be as loving and caring to do the little things to generously acknowledge others.

And finally, like Mary’s exuberant response to the empty tomb, we need to go and tell others what we have witnessed with our own eyes of faith. We are called to speak our truth to proclaim what we know in our heart of hearts: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:19,20)