

MARY MAGDALENE AND THE RISEN LORD

Taken from a talk by the Rev. B. David Holm

Lessons: Mark 16, John 20:1-18

After the Lord was crucified on Friday, Joseph of Arimathea took the Lord's body down from the cross, wrapped it in fine linen and laid it in a new sepulcher, a short distance from Jerusalem. This sepulcher was in a beautiful garden. Joseph rolled a big stone in front of the door of the sepulcher. With great sadness, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of James) watched while all this was done. Then they all left with heavy hearts.

The next day was Saturday—the Jewish Sabbath—and no work could be done. So it was not until very early Sunday morning, before it was light, that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary could return to the sepulcher to care for the Lord's body. They carried sweet spices with them, to anoint His body. They were still grieving and very sad, for they thought that the Lord had been killed and that they would never see Him alive again.

As they walked to the tomb, they asked each other, "Who shall help us roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?" They knew that they could not do it, for it was a very large stone. Imagine their surprise when they arrived at the sepulcher and found the stone already rolled away! An angel of the Lord had come down from heaven and rolled back the stone from the door, but the women did not know this. They thought someone had come and taken away the Lord's body, for they saw that the sepulcher was empty.

Mary Magdalene ran back to Jerusalem to tell Peter and John that someone had taken the Lord's body out of the sepulcher. Peter and John immediately ran to the sepulcher to see for themselves. When they got there, they too saw the empty tomb, with just the linen clothes that had been wrapped around the Lord's body. The body of the Lord was gone! They, too, must have thought that someone had taken it away. After Peter and John had seen the empty sepulcher, they returned to Jerusalem.

Remember, neither Mary Magdalene, nor the other woman, nor Peter, nor John, yet knew that the Lord was risen from the dead. They thought someone had taken the body away. So after Peter and John had left, Mary Magdalene stayed at the sepulcher, and she was weeping.

Mary Magdalene had a great and special love for the Lord. She had a very important reason to love the Lord so much. You see, when she first came to the Lord some years before, she was in great trouble, for seven devils had possessed her. These seven devils no doubt had made her do terrible things.

But the Lord saved Mary Magdalene by casting out the devils and making her well again. She was very grateful to the Lord and loved Him very much because of this. From that time on she was one of the Lord's most faithful followers. She must have been heartbroken when she saw the Lord crucified. Now His body was gone, and she wept by the sepulcher.

As Mary wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulcher. A wonderful thing now happened. The sepulcher was no longer empty! There were two angels, dressed in white, sitting there. They spoke to her and asked her why she was weeping. She answered, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

Then Mary turned away from the tomb and saw someone she thought was the gardener. He asked her why she was weeping and who she was looking for. Still thinking He was the gardener, she asked Him where the body of her Lord had been laid, for she wanted to anoint it.

Then the Lord said her name—"Mary." And when He said that, she suddenly knew who He was—the risen Lord. She said to Him, "Rabboni," meaning "master." Can you imagine Mary Magdalene's great joy? The Lord, who she thought was dead, was really *alive!* Her heart must have been bursting with happiness!

Notice that Mary did not know who the Lord was right away, even though she saw Him standing there before her. We might wonder why, if she loved the Lord so much, knew Him so well, and believed in Him, she did not recognize Him immediately? Mary's eyes had deceived her because she was spiritually "blind". She was thinking about what she had seen in the natural world, and her natural eyes had seen the Lord's body die. She did not know the truth—that the Lord was not dead but risen! She was unaware of the Lord's Divine plans. She needed to be able to see Him *spiritually* instead of *naturally*. In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, we are told that blindness represents an ignorance of truth. Without truth, humans cannot learn about the Lord or about how to become angels.

The Heavenly Doctrine also tells us that at the time of the Lord's birth, the human race had lost or perverted all of His truth. So it was necessary for the Lord to come on earth in a human body and give us that truth once again. We are told that "in heaven nothing is acknowledged as truth except what is seen, that is, understood." "Moreover," the passage continues, "the light of heaven is such that by it truths appear before the understanding of the mind, as objects in the world appear before the sight of the eye..." (*Apocalypse Explained* 759). And where else could the light of heaven be greater than in the presence of the Lord Himself?

It is interesting that Mary only recognized the Lord when she heard Him speak. We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that “hearing” corresponds to acknowledging truth. We all need to learn how to recognize the truth when we hear the Lord speaking to us.

So, on Easter, think of the Risen Lord and Mary Magdalene in the beautiful garden near the sepulcher on that first Easter morning. The Lord, who is Life Itself, rose from the dead so that He could give *us* life—so that He could save us from evil—just as He had saved Mary Magdalene from the seven devils. What a beautiful message of hope for all people! The Lord lives and is present with each of us every moment—guiding and leading us with His truth and love.

Amen.