

## **Hosanna to Alleluia**

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010

John 20:1-18

Good Shepherd Church

The Rev. Este Gardner Cantor

Well, Alleluia and Halleluiah!

We have made it all the way through the dark winter of Lent, the passion and sadness of Holy Week, and now the Hosannas we cried out on Palm Sunday have turned – thank God – to Alleluias. Now, Hosanna does not mean “Praise God” like Alleluia does. It is a Hebrew word that means emphatically, “Help! NOW!” People were waving those palm branches and calling out to Jesus, “Help us! Save us!” And on Palm Sunday we shouted along with them, begging for help for the oppressed within us and in the world, help for our fears and for all the fearful, for those who mourn within us and without us.

Mary Magdalene must have been looking for help when she found the tomb where Jesus was laid. She wanted help in her great sorrow, help in her mourning as we who mourn always do. She had once received some kind of profound help from Jesus, according the gospel of Luke, when Jesus exorcised seven demons from her body. According to the gospel of Luke she was a woman of means who supported Jesus’ ministry from her own wealth. And in all four gospels, she is identified as the first apostle to proclaim the risen Christ.

So very early on the first day of the week, she crept to the tomb, probably because she wanted to see her teacher again, even in death. This took considerable courage, as all who knew Jesus had now fled, and as we know, Peter, who was probably typical of the group, denied even knowing him three

times. She was devastated that her beloved teacher had died the death of a common criminal, executed like a thief. Perhaps she wanted to honor him in some way.

So in the dark, just before dawn, she came to the tomb, but found to her amazement that the great stone that was rolled up to seal the grave, to protect the body from thieves and animals, had been rolled away. It seems from the reading that she did not even go into the tomb to check, she just seems to assume that Jesus is gone. Her distress must have risen even higher, not even to be able to see her Lord's body, not even to be able to cry by his tomb. So she runs to Peter and the beloved disciple. Now there seems to commence an exciting competitive footrace to the tomb, with the beloved disciple arriving first. Unlike Mary, he DOES look inside the tomb, and he sees that Jesus is gone. Somehow, just by seeing the linen wrappings, the beloved disciple believed – we are not sure what he believed – and maybe he just believed that Jesus was in fact gone. Peter shows up and, as clueless as ever, does not seem to understand. So they decide to just go home. Mary is somehow there, although she is not mentioned in the footrace. She begins to weep, and finally has the courage to look into the tomb, still weeping. She sees two angels.

They ask her why she weeps. Still crying she explains that Jesus has been taken away. She must have been weeping very hard, because when Jesus is standing there before her, even speaking to her, she does not recognize him. It seems likely that the risen Christ did not look very much like the earthly Jesus. But how exalted could he have looked? She thought he was the gardener.

Anyway, Jesus has to jolt her awake by crying out, "MARY!" She must have recognized his voice more than she recognized his face. "Rabbouni!" she cries, which is an Aramaic endearment meaning "My teacher" Then Jesus makes the

mysterious request that she not touch him. This may have been a way of saying that she should not try to keep him in his earthly body – she should not interrupt the coming resurrection, his triumphant and contagious victory over death. This may be a comment for all of us when we mourn – we too have to let the resurrection happen.

Then Jesus tells her to go to her brothers in the movement and tell them that he is ascending to his father and their father, to his God and their God. He seems to be saying that what is true for him is also true for them: they are also children of God and, as he told them before, he goes to prepare a place for them.

Then Mary Magdalene runs joyfully to the other disciples – her fears and mourning at an end – and announces, "I have seen the Lord."

One of my favorite images of Christ is an icon showing him pulling Adam and Eve out of their tombs – literally pulling them from death into life. He grasps them by their wrists – not by their hands – implying that he is doing all the pulling: it is the grace of his resurrection and not our own efforts that save us. When Jesus lifted himself out of that tomb he lifted Mary Magdalene and all humanity out of the tomb as well.

A beautiful Orthodox hymn for Easter goes:

"It is the day of Resurrection; let us be radiant for the festival, and let us embrace one another. Let us say, O brethren, even to those that hate us: Let us forgive all things on the Resurrection; and thus let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead – by death He has trampled down death, and on those in the tombs He has bestowed life."

Christ in his death has killed death. Christ has made captivity a captive. So that all that is dead within us is brought blazingly alive. That within us that is captive now knows perfect freedom. That within us that has been dark is now flooded with light.

As beautifully said by John Chrisostom,

Hell grasped a corpse and met God

Hell seized earth and encountered heaven

Hell took what it saw, and was overcome by what it could not see.

For those of us skilled in creating our own private hell – there is hope – there is life after hell!

Jesus lived and died fully as the word of God incarnate. When he died, that word – so powerful, so transformational in its truth, its love, and its justice – came blazingly alive in the hearts of Mary Magdalene and the small band of Jesus' followers.

Jesus lived and died a life suffused with love and he showed us how to do the same thing. How to pull ourselves out of our own graves and into a life suffused with love.

As Jalal ad-Din Rumi would have it:

Inside each of us, there's continual autumn. Our leaves  
fall and are blown out over the water.

A crow sits on the blackened limbs and talks  
about what's gone.

Then love returns: spring, moisture, intelligence, the  
scent of hyacinth and rose and cypress

There's a necessary dying, and then Jesus breathes.

Very little grows on jagged rock.

Be ground. Be crumbled, so wildflowers will spring up  
where you are.

Alleluia – Christ is Risen!