

Kim O'Brien, Sermon Easter 4/17/2022, John 20:1-18

There is so much chaos in today's scripture passage.

We don't like chaos.

We like our scripture to be neat, straightforward and tidy

Just how we like our schedules and our plans for the next great thing

Just how we like ourselves, smart and on top of things

Just how we like God, predictable and in control /

But on this Easter morning, in the story of Jesus' resurrection

Our likes are challenged as we're thrown into chaos and unknowing

We zoom in on Mary Magdalene and enter the messiness of her reality

Friday she witnessed the horror of the crucifixion of her friend, her teacher

Her beloved

He was cruelly crucified and discarded

Saturday she honored the Sabbath as best she could

Perhaps out of a chaotic mixture of obligation, fear, devotion and desperation

And this morning, while it is still dark, she leaves her home for Jesus' tomb.

Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons Jesus cast out

Mary Magdalene, Jesus closest companion

Mary Magdalene, who's been up all night with blood-shot eyes and tear-soaked bed sheets

She's like us, wanting to create order in the midst of chaos

She's like us, preferring to control situations

She has been waiting to **DO** something about this mess

So, she plows through her grief-laden, exhausted, and fearful fog

And goes to the tomb

Alone

In the dark

An act of resistance with great risk,

To anoint Jesus' body. / /

When she arrives she sees that things aren't as she expected

The stone is rolled away

So she runs to get some others - and they run to see... out-running each other

All this running adds to the chaos of this early Sunday morning

They run full-out and find the tomb empty

With the burial cloths left behind

We glimpse the perspective of "the other disciple" - who wasn't even named here

He had faith, he believed - and went back home with Peter

His perspective would offer a much neater and tidier ending

The other disciple demonstrates the predictability we prefer

But the story plunges us back into chaos

with the perspective of Mary Magdalene

Who stayed \ \ and wept

She didn't find faith in the empty tomb - she only found tears

When I think about Mary Magdalene, I wonder about the seven demons that Jesus cast out of her.

I wonder if they were like the demons we struggle with today?

The demons that hang out inside our minds and our culture

Demons like unworthiness,

Maybe shame

Fear

Maybe a bit of self-justification,

Control

Or the longing for power \ \

I wonder if these demons were gone forever

Or if maybe, like with us, they crept back into Mary's mind when she was not at her best

I wonder if Mary believed that she was healed

Or if she gave all the credit to her incredible teacher and friend, Jesus

As she clung to him.

She followed him around, learning all she could, hanging onto his every word

Because he made her better

I wonder about these demons because we all struggle with demons

And, like faith, healing isn't straightforward, neat or tidy

So this morning we zoom in on Mary Magdalene in the midst of this chaos and she seems stuck / / entombed

Entombed in her disbelief

Entombed in her grief

Entombed in her hopelessness

Entombed in the old, well-worn paths of those seven demons

It doesn't seem like she believed that Jesus is God,

Who conquers all things, including death

As she sat and wept / /

She knew Jesus best,

She was one of his closest companions

And yet here she sits, crying and entombed in her old thinking / /

The chaos continues as Mary turns around and sees a man,

maybe the gardener

She doesn't recognize him

He asks her - why are you crying? Who are you looking for?

Then Mary challenges him,

In spite of her tear soaked cheeks she finds a bit of courage and says

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Mary wants Jesus back.

Mary is willing to do whatever it takes to be near him, to touch him one more time

To cling to him

This situation is so chaotic and she's grasping for anything to regain some control

With Jesus things weren't so chaotic

With Jesus her demons couldn't take up much space inside her head

With Jesus it seemed she was on top of things

With Jesus Mary didn't have to believe because the schedule was packed and they were on to the next great thing

"Mary!"

He calls her name

"Mary!"

She turns and says "Teacher!"

You can imagine the mixture of emotions in her voice

It's him!

The chaos continues to swirl in this moment twisting tears, grief, joy, laughter, confusion and recognition into this single word

Teacher!

Mary longs to hold onto Jesus... yet

Jesus tells her "Do not hold on to me...but go"

But go

Jesus knows the society and culture Mary lives in, with its domination and oppression

Jesus knows the risk he's asking Mary to take, as a woman

Jesus knows Mary's past and present, all the things that hold her back

And he tells her to **Go**

Her healing is not about the person of Jesus whose every word she clung to and every act she observed

It's about the One to whom Jesus pointed

It's about the One Jesus reflected

It's about the One Jesus embodied

It's about God, Jesus the Christ, the Holy Spirit within which all things are possible

And in this moment, I think Mary Magdalene was truly healed of her seven demons

Because before she didn't believe she was whole

She gave all that credit to her amazing teacher, Jesus

But now Jesus tells her not to cling to him

/ / Friends, we are Mary/ /

We become entombed in our old thinking

We cling to ideas and people - things we think make us better

Things like power and control

Things like dependence and the limitations of the way things are

Our demons continue to race around inside our minds

As we hurry on to the next great thing

Today, we are Mary

We doubt that God heals us

We doubt that God frees us and raises US

We doubt that God calls us

We doubt that God sends us \ \

On this Easter morning God is calling us into wholeness

God's love and grace and fullness are all ready with us,

all ready given to us,

God has conquered our demons so they no longer define who we are

This is what it means to be Christian

The embodied church in the world

Easter people! \ \

So what are you clinging to?

It's time to let go

This morning God is sending you out, in all of your beloved wholeness

"But go!" / /

Today Mary Magdalene believed

And she went, and risked

and she proclaimed

In freedom, wholeness and authority given to her by God

She became the disciple to the disciples

"I have seen the Lord"

Happy Easter