

Lent Devotion for Sunday, April 9

John 20:1-18

THE APOSTLE TO THE APOSTLES

“Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and to your Father and to my God and your God.’”

Although all four Evangelists report that Mary Magdalene was present at the cross and at the tomb of Jesus and Luke notes that Mary, called Magdalene (because she was from Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee), had been exorcised of seven demons and was among the women who accompanied Jesus and the Twelve and supported them out of their means, it is only the Fourth Gospel that tells the riveting story of Mary Magdalene as the “apostle to the apostles.” Over the sweep of Christian history, Mary has been referred to as such because Jesus commissioned her to tell his other disciples of his resurrection and pending ascension.

John 20 commences by indicating that once Mary Magdalene, who journeyed to Jesus’ tomb on the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday) under the cloak of night, discovered that the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb’s entrance had been removed that she made a bee-line to Simon Peter and the “other disciple” to tell them that the Lord had been taken out of the tomb and that his whereabouts were now unknown. Her report to Peter and the “other disciple” prompts them in turn to hightail it to Jesus’ tomb, where they discover Jesus’ graveclothes but do not see the Lord.

While Peter and the “other disciple” take leave, Mary lingers at the tomb weeping. Stooping down and peering into the tomb, she discovers two angels who ask her why she is crying. She responds that “they,” whoever “they” might be, have removed her Lord from the tomb and that she has not the foggiest notion of where “they” have put him. Straightening up and turning around from the tomb, Mary sees a man, who she thinks is a gardener. This man, like the angels, asks her why she is crying. He also asks Mary for whom she is looking.

The suspense as well as the irony increase further when Mary requests of the “gardener” that in the event he has removed Jesus to tell her where so that she might get him. John then springs the proverbial trap when the “gardener” reveals that he knows who she is in calling her by name. This enables Mary to see who he is. Calling him “Rabboni” (or Teacher), she begins to cling to him. Instructing her that he is yet to ascend, Jesus sends Mary to go and to tell his other disciples that he is alive and will be ascending to his and their God and Father. Thankfully, Mary does as she is instructed, declaring to them, “I have seen the Lord!”

Mary, who knew the voice of the “good shepherd,” used her voice to declare to the disciples and others that the now risen and soon-to-be exalted Lord, would continue to lead and to feed them.

On this Easter morn, Our Loving Lord, who became a Lamb, we pray that you would lead us like a shepherd so that we might continue to experience your presence and bear witness to your resurrected life by living cruciformed lives. Amen.