

John 20: 1-18  
Bad News, Good News and the Best News!

Their meager breakfast of bread and cheese was interrupted by the sound of a woman weeping. Even through the anguish and emotion, Simon Peter and John immediately recognized the voice of Mary Magdalene, the one whom Jesus had healed early on in his ministry. Looking at each other with a mixture of sadness and anger, they were unsure of what to do next. In their minds Jesus was dead; the time for crying was over. It was time to get on with their lives. There were bills to pay, fishing nets to mend, and little time for dwelling on what they should have, could have or would have done to keep their friend from dying a few days earlier. Imagine their reaction when they heard the latest bit of bad news. In between her sobs of grief, Mary managed to spit out the words-someone has taken Jesus body from the tomb. Their hearts fell, and the plans they had made that morning were changed in an instant.

Can you see Peter grabbing his sword, swearing to find the people responsible? They run towards the tomb and John gets there first. Afraid of what he might find inside, he cautiously peers into the tomb in the morning fog and saw that Mary was right- there is no Jesus. Expecting the aroma of burial spices and decomposing flesh he sees nothing there but a pile of linen strips that once wrapped the body of his best friend. Just then Peter arrives, shoves John out of the way and storms into the tomb. Like John, he didn't know what to make of what he saw. The neatly rolled burial shroud on the stone shelf seemed out of place with the scattered pieces of linen strips used to wrap Jesus body. Why in the world would someone do this? Who in their right mind would unwrap the corpse, throw the strips of linen in a pile, neatly roll up the burial shroud and then steal the body of their friend, this one who was beaten and spit upon a just a few days earlier?

Gathering his composure, perhaps even trying to comfort Mary, John enters the tomb next. He saw the same thing Peter did, but his reaction was different. In verse 8, the Bible records that instead of being angry and confused he saw and believed. The unanswered question is what he believed, especially since the next verse reveals that they did not yet understand the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Even more telling is verse 10- then the disciples returned to their homes. Despite what they had just seen, they returned to their homes. But not Mary. She wasn't about to leave until she knew what happened to Jesus. She continued to search for the truth, and she would not rest until she knew for certain where He was. Her diligence and perseverance did not go unrewarded. Woman, why are you weeping? What a strange question to ask someone visiting the grave of a loved one. Do you wonder if Peter and John asked her the same question earlier that morning? Thinking it was the caretaker of the garden, she pressed on for the truth. Sobbing uncontrollably, she asks the question. Where is he? Tell me where he is. Sensing her desire to know the truth, Jesus answers her in a single word. "Mary". In other words, I am right here. I am the one who took me from the tomb.

It wasn't until she was asked "why are you weeping" for maybe the twentieth or thirtieth time since Jesus died, this time by Jesus Himself, that Mary Magdalene recognized the risen Jesus. It seems Peter and John were right, even though they didn't know it at the time. The time for crying was over. The presence of the risen Christ had changed everything. His resurrection changed everything.

The bad news that His body was stolen from the tomb was not bad news at all. It might sound strange, but Jesus was the one that took it. Jesus rose Himself from the dead. John 2:19-22 Even the greatest of skeptics must admit that is something that only God can do. Evil and death are the greatest enemies of humanity, and the fact that Jesus conquered them is truly good news. But the good news gets even better. The one who raised Himself from the dead offers us the opportunity to rise with Him. Here is what He said about it. John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

Never is a strong word, but aren't you glad Jesus used it? It sounds too good to be true, but it is. Jesus suffered and died so that we don't have to. Certainly nothing we have done or will do merits that kind of love. Because of His death and resurrection, we can face our own mortality and close our eyes in peace, knowing that one day we will rise again, just as Jesus did. To quote Bill and Gloria Gaither because He lives, we can face tomorrow, and because He lives all fear is gone. Because we know He holds the future life is worth living just because He lives. Folks that is not just good news but the best news ever.

As long as we have breath, let us continue to live as people that have been raised from the dead. Let us continue to share all the news, the bad, the good and the best. Let us continue to be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by His blood. He is risen! Hallelujah and Amen!