

“It is Finished, and It’s Not Over”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: John 20: 1-18 Acts 10: 34-43

John 20: 1-18 -- *The Resurrection of Jesus*

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept,

she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, **“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”** Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, **“Mary!”** She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, **“Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”** ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Acts 10: 34-43 -- *Gentiles Hear the Good News*

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were

chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

It is Finished

*“I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear,
Falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.*

*And he walks with me,
And he talks with me,
And he tells me that I am his own,
And the joy we share,
While we tarry there,
None other has ever known.”*

C. Austin Miles wrote the words and music to “In the Garden” in 1913.

Ever since, whenever we come to an experience of endings,

to a sense of completion, to bask in fulfillment,

to celebrate that God walks and talks with us,

to affirm that God knows our names and
our needs,

we gather together and sing “In the
Garden”

When it comes time to share the Bread of Life and the Cup of
Salvation in Holy Communion

we are going to sing this message of hope and healing,

like we do most every Easter.

We’ve sung “In the Garden” throughout the new days of spring

as seeds once dead to the world suddenly sprout into new
life.

We share this song at funerals and memorial services.

We’ve sung it in times of sadness and loss,

and we lifted these words in one voice as a reminder of
the power of God’s promise.

Heaven knows that church organists and musicians have the
tune memorized.

And we perceive that our children love “In the Garden”

because it offers a new, familiar name for Christ.

You know what we are talking about:

“Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me, Andy tells me that I am His own...”

It is Finished

Mary went to the cemetery to prepare a friend’s body for burial

yet ended up in the garden,

where she had a life-changing encounter with holy.

Listen for the Word of God.

14 [Mary] turned around and saw Jesus standing there,

but she did not know that it was Jesus.

¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him,

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him,

and I will take him away.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which

means Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, *“Do not hold on to me [Do not cling to me],*

because I have not yet ascended to the Father.

But go to my brothers and say to them,

‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”

Faith is filled with surprises.

Here we encounter a testament from a soul who was looking for closure

and then being totally surprised by a fresh start

Mary went looking for closure, holding fast to her past,

only to discover by the grace of God

how to embrace what was there in front of her.

It is Finished

Earlier that week, she had stood at the foot of the cross on Calvary and wept.

Mary heard Jesus of Nazareth utter his last words, saying, *“It is finished.”*

For Mary and the disciples, “It is finished” sounded so final.

Their actions inform us that they understood “It is finished”

to mean that Jesus’ life was finished, over, done;

and it stands to reason that so was the
relationship

they had with their Rabbi, their teacher,
their friend.

So Mary returned to her home and mourned.

In her heart and mind there was a painful void

that would last an hour, a day, a lifetime.

She treasured memories of days gone past.

She relived precious moments and experiences,

keeping them alive by choosing to remember

the unconditional love of God-with-us,
Emmanuel.

Then something new moved in to fill the empty place:

a desire for closure, a renewed purpose,

the will to put one foot in front of the other,

a deepening sense of the presence of God.

Now, early in the morning,

she arose and went to the tomb to take care of the
body.

Mary was looking for closure.

How do you find closure when that which you have held dear
is swept away? Gone? Over? Done? Finished?

She may have thought, *“There is one thing I can do. I cannot
bring him back to life,*

but I can take care of his body.

*I can prepare his body for
a proper burial.”*

However, when she arrived at the tomb she found the body
missing.

Mary resisted belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
into life everlasting.

We can relate;

we’ve been there, staring into the abyss,

praying that we run out of time before we run
out of hope.

It is Finished

How do you find closure?

Mary Magdalene hoped she could find closure if she gave Jesus a
proper burial.

Jesus Christ returned seeking closure as well.

He returned to assure his disciples and us that all is well,
that sin and separation no longer hold sway over our
lives,
that greed and hatred and bigotry shall be
overcome,
that forgiveness is more than a word, it is a
way of life,
and that death has lost its sting!

Mary and Jesus met in the garden.

He called her by name.

She called him by title.

She moved toward him.

He told her to not hold on to him, to not cling to his image or
memory.

He told her to go, to move into a new future,

to tell the news that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Are you seeking closure for some aspect of your life and journey
of faith?

Do you need to meet with Christ in the garden?

He will meet you there, and he will call you his own.

He will point you in surprising and new directions.

In order for you to find closure

is there someone you need to forgive, or to ask for forgiveness?

Is there a blessed soul to whom you need to say thank you,

to give expression to the gratitude you carry within?

Is there a relationship that was once alive and well

which is now lost or misplaced or misunderstood,

and now in need of an extreme makeover?

It is Finished

We who live on this side of the Resurrection of Our Lord

ascribe theological – rather than physical -- meaning

to Jesus' last words from the Cross, "It is finished."

With his last outward breath Jesus said, "It is finished,"

which we interpret to mean that the first chapter of God's mission was finished,

accomplished, completed, fulfilled,

and therefore a new chapter was to begin.

Our faith tells us that our last breath on earth

is followed by our first breath in heaven.

When He died on the Cross, clearly Jesus' life on earth was finished;

yet his life after life was only beginning, and so was ours.

It is finished, and it is not over!

The Good News is that when Jesus' earthly mission

was fulfilled, accomplished, completed,

God then prepared to send the Holy Spirit

to empower humanity to embrace our lives of discipleship.

Jesus had shared God's plan and purpose

with Mary and the disciples a few days earlier, saying,

"I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away,

for if I do not go away, the Advocate [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you;

but if I go, I will send him to you." -- John 16:

6b-7

It is finished, and it is not over!

The power death and sin had over us is finished, and life is not over!

Thanks be to God, when we get distracted and discouraged looking into tombs,

the Holy Spirit calls and commands us to embrace new beginnings.

The Holy Spirit is with you and me right now, forever and ever,

advocating for us and filling us to overflowing with resurrection power,

redemption power, reconciliation power, renewal power,

rehabilitation power, and resuscitation power.

By the refreshing waters of our baptism we are all ordained to Christian ministry.

Through the Holy Spirit, each of us and all of us

can testify as Jesus did and say:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." --Luke 4: 18-19

The Spirit of the Lord will empower you to trust

to let go of past pains and let God lead you to embrace what is before you.

You know the story of the Christian who was on a mountain hike and slipped off the path,

and suddenly found himself dangling off a cliff edge,

clinging to a tiny branch for all he was worth.

He shouted for help, saying, "Is there anyone out there?"

A voice from heaven said, "I am here, and I love you. Let go, and I will save you."

The Christian looked down and then yelled, "Is there anyone else out there?"

It is finished, and it is not over!

Life is like a garden, and Jesus is our Gardener, watering us with

the Holy Spirit.

Seed and re-seed, cultivate, reap what you sow through the Gardener,

who meets you in loss and death and despair, and leads you into a new day.

After my father passed away in 2005,

my mother reflected on his willingness to allow God

to move in him and through him for a greater plan and purpose.

George Calvert was willing to be used by God

to become a seed of hope and healing and hospitality

in a broken and fragmented world.

After his passing, Buffy Calvert wrote a poem called “Suppose the Seed”.

“Suppose the Seed”^[1] By: Elizabeth Stuart Calvert

Suppose the seed
looked at the sower
And said, “I’m perfect!
Round and firm,
Shiny, unblemished.

Don't you like me
just as I am?
How can you
soak me, bloat me,
bury my beauty,
bruise me, break me open,
spoil my neat coat?
Is this love?"

And am I not that seed,
so smug and self-satisfied.
So happy in love?
I only asked to stay
Unbruised and whole.

George went gentle into that good-night;
I rage, rage against the dying of his light.

It is finished, and it is not over!

Seeds look perfect, whole, and complete in and of themselves.

Yet if a seed is to have meaning and purpose, there is risk and danger involved.

Each seed has the capacity to connect with the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

Each seed must be planted in the ground,

where it first must become dirty, wet, split apart, shaken to its core,

fight upward to breathe the air and feel the Sun,

and then, thanks to its scars and past fragmentation,

will never again look like such perfection,

yet will come to fruition as a wonderful new life,

a gift of God for the whole of creation.

It is finished, and it is not over!

We have many, many times and experiences when we wonder if it is finished,

and then suddenly, surprisingly, joyfully,

Jesus calls us by name, walks with us, talks with us, tells us we are God's own.

We think it is finished

only to discover our joy has no end,

for a new life in Christ is unfolding within

and blossoming before our very eyes.

My friends, my fellow seeds of hope,

seeds of healing,

seeds of hospitality,

what do you need to let go, let die, let be

in order to embrace what is before you?

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] *An Affair of the Heart: A Memoir*, By Elizabeth Stuart Calvert, Published by Bookstand Publishing Morgan Hill, CA, 2011.