

No Greater Love † In Life ²

† **The cost of loss for Mary (vv.1-2,11-13)**

† **God's grace in holy joy (vv.14-18)**

In the Name of Jesus, our the soul's best Friend, dear loved ones in the Lord:

This week read *Meditations*, and you'll hear about three-year-old James who had plenty of questions for his grandma. "Where's Mom?" "She's at work, James." "Where's Samuel?" "Your brother Sam is taking a nap." "Where's Daddy?" Grandma's voice caught on a tear, "Daddy is in heaven with Jesus." "Okay," James smiled and repeated, "Daddy is in heaven with Jesus." Then he ran off to play. Amazing how quickly little children grasp this awesome truth about our crucified and risen Savior. There is **No Greater Love † In Life**. See it first in a woman's bounce from grief to joy. Consider...

† **The cost of loss for Mary (vv.1-2,11-13)**

Along with Jesus' mother there are several Mary's in the resurrection story. This Mary apparently came from the tiny town of Magdala, very close to Capernaum on the northwest shore of Galilee. The ruins are being excavated these days. But Mary's reason for her special relationship with Jesus goes deeper than any archaeologist could dig. From Mary Magdalene our Lord Jesus had driven seven demons (Luke 8:2). She was one who benefitted personally from Jesus' power over the devil. To be freed from that terrible demon possession gave Mary Magdalene such joy that she joined other women using her own money to support Jesus and His disciples. She watched at the cross till Christ finished our salvation. She followed to the garden sepulcher with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. She bought sweet spices and got up early to go and anoint Jesus' body. Mary Magdalene just wanted to finish burying her best and truest Friend. She had no hope of resurrection, no expectation of anything but death.

The cost of loss for Mary is The cost of loss for us too – if Christ is not raised. If Mary had found the tomb as she expected, then Jesus is not the Son of God as He claimed, only an imposter, a tragic figure loved by many, but real help to none. If Christ is not raised, we are still guilty of our sins, and death is just the beginning of eternal torment under the wrath of an angry God. If Mary had found Jesus' body lying there as she expected, we could not trust anything He said. For Jesus claimed early in His three-year ministry: ***"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*** (John 2:19) No one else knew at the time He was talking about His body, but Jesus did. Jesus is either true, or He is a liar. He is either our Savior or a terrible failure. Jesus is either God's own Son or a fanatic from whom to run.

Mary was so grateful for God's kindness, she would not let Him go. As she went out to the tomb with the other women, they were mostly concerned about the heavy stone blocking the entrance. (Mark 16:1f) Apparently, when she saw the grave open, Mary Magdalene did not wait to look inside. She turned and ran with the terrible news to Peter and John, ***"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," she told them, "and we don't know where they put him!"*** Those two raced out to find the grave in perfect order. Absolutely everything was still in place, including the linen wrappings that had been around Jesus' body and the face cloth which had been on His head. All were in their places; just the body was gone! John believed, but they both ***"still did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead."***

Of course, Mary could not stay away. She had to go back. She had to cry her heart out, to sob as never before. The empty grave to her brought unexpected sorrow to the depths of her soul.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

² From Lenten series: *No Greater Love – Our Savior's Passion Sermons*. March-April, 2014 – New Life, Shoreview, MN

Sometimes we look back and think people in times past were more used to death and maybe didn't hurt as bad. My wife and I were looking at gravestones in Hay Creek, Minnesota. "Mark, come over here," Cindy called. Lined up in a row were three little markers with the name "Cordes." A set of twins and an infant of "P. and M." Cordes died within weeks of each other in 1870. Research revealed an influenza epidemic that took them all. What tragedies we suffer here. But something happened in that family. Paul and Mary Cordes had helped found the Lutheran church in Hay Creek, then moved a few miles away to homestead again and found another Lutheran church with land they donated. Seven more children were born and buried with spouses and extended family in the West Florence cemetery. What kind of power could revive such hopes as these? Mary Magdalene found out, totally unexpected...

✦ God's grace in holy joy (vv.14-18)

Sobbing outside the tomb of Jesus, Mary Magdalene finally bent over and looked inside. *"Two angels in white were sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been."* Through her tears she did not recognize them as angels or realize that Easter had dawned. They asked in kind hearted sympathy, *"Woman, why are you crying?"* She could only answer in extended grief, *"Because they have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they laid him."*

Turning away, she saw a man standing behind her outside the tomb. *"Woman, why are you crying?"* Was it her tears? The fact that she did not expect to see Jesus there? Did Jesus look different than before? Did He keep her from recognizing Him? For whatever reason, she thought Jesus was the gardener. Her confusion helps convince us that this was not made up. To his question she gave a more personal answer: *"Sir, if you carried him off, tell me where you laid him, and I will get him."*

How much does God have to say to get through? Just a word will do. When someone loves you so, just the sound of that dear one saying your name is enough. From the depths of despair to the heights of **holy joy** Jesus took her with a single word. Jesus said, *"Mary."*

Their relationship is one that scholars and movie writers will never understand unless they have experienced it themselves. It is deeper, richer, wider and brighter than the most intimate relationship between a man and a woman. Hollywood always wants romance. The relationship Mary Magdalene had with Jesus was so much better. She summed it up in a single word from their Aramaic language: *"Rabboni"* – which means literally, "My Teacher!"

God's grace in holy joy – none but His loved ones know. You understand why she wanted to grab hold of Jesus and never let go. You understand why Jesus showed their close relationship during His ministry on earth would be different now. She would not lose Him, but have Him in a new, glorious way.

Again, Jesus says so much in so few words. He preached His first sermon here to Mary Magdalene after her deep woe and grief at His grave. Jesus gave Mary a new purpose in resurrection life. Jesus said, *"Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father – to my God and your God.'"* His ascension would follow in forty days (Acts 1). But now Jesus instructs Mary, *"Go to my brothers...."* Before Jesus called them *"friends," "dear children."* (John 13:33; 15:14) But now He uses a most affectionate, glorious name: *"Brothers."* This after they had forsaken Him and denied Him, failed to listen and learn of His death and resurrection. All God's love is wrapped up in that single word, *"Brothers."* You have reason to believe now and forever in Jesus as your risen Lord and Savior. Pure forgiveness of all your sins gave them encouragement enough to *"go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."* (Mark 16:16)³

In Baptism Jesus has called you by name. In His Holy Supper you look into the loving face of God. You have an announcement to make like Mary's: *"I have seen the Lord!"* Say it loud and clear. There is **No Greater Love ✦ In Life**. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.

³ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, "Postil." Lenker, ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, re-printed 1988, Vol. II, pp. 250ff.

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New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126