

## Easter Focus

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance...Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. John 20:1, 11-18

"Just look straight ahead and keep pedaling." These are words we told all our children at the beginning stages of riding a bike. We knew what would happen when they didn't heed that advice. When they looked down or allowed something to distract them, they lost their focus. Hands quivered. Handle bars wavered until finally they fell.

One Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene lost her focus. She had been a follower of Jesus since the early part of his public ministry. She listened to his words, turned from her sin, and professed her faith. Mary certainly was eager to be a part of Jesus' life, and more importantly, have him be a part of hers. But then one fateful day, he was taken from her as his broken, beaten body was taken from the cross and sealed shut in a dark tomb.

Imagine her grief. Mary's world was being torn apart. Her friend, her Savior, was dead and buried. He was gone, but Mary showed she still cared for him and went to the tomb on the third day after Jesus' death to put some spices on his body.

The Gospel of John tells us how the next minutes transpired...how Mary lost her focus. Even after Jesus had told his followers repeatedly that he had to die and rise from the dead, she couldn't see beyond her grief and despair. John and Peter were different. They ran to see what Mary saw – an empty tomb. But they saw and believed and went back home to tell the others. Not Mary. She stayed at the tomb, crying, even weeping. She was absolutely overcome with grief. Then she saw Jesus. Maybe her eyes were blurry from tears or maybe Jesus had prevented Mary from recognizing him initially. We don't know why she doesn't know it's him, but she definitely lost her focus enough to momentarily forget that Jesus promised to rise from the dead. She didn't keep her eyes and her heart focused on Jesus and the words he had spoken to her many times over the past few years.

Oh, and how I lose focus too! I have my eyes and heart on Jesus when his blessings are vivid in my life. I hear and believe his promises spoken to me by faithful Christians and read with my own eyes. I profess my faith with my church family and when I encourage others. But then an unexpected illness comes, an unfulfilled desire or a financial hardship, and I lose my focus. I, like Mary, can't see beyond my own grief and despair. And so I try to find my own cure, a new gratification, my own solution. I lose sight of Jesus and his good and perfect will and instead turn to self. I forget his promises. I quiver. I shake. I waver. Just like a young child on a bike. Until finally, all on my own, I fall. I succumb to the tempter's tactics to distract me and take my eyes and mind off of Jesus, my Savior.

But remember how Jesus gained Mary's focus again. He said her name, "Mary," and immediately she knew this was her Savior Jesus in the flesh. Her eyes could now see Jesus and her heart was re-focused on his words to her. Jesus brought her focus back where it needed to be – on him and his promises. He told her to "Go and tell." With renewed joy and a clear focus, she went back to tell the others what she had seen and heard.

And so it is with you. It is all too easy to allow the stresses and trials of this world to take your focus off Jesus. But then Jesus calls you to repentance for the unnecessary grief and despair, for doubting his promises, and gives us his full and free forgiveness. He calls out your name through his Word that you read privately or is spoken by your husband, a friend or your children, and once again you can see Jesus – the true focus of this life and the life eternal to come. Our Savior's resurrection gives us the assurance of a life forever with him.

**Prayer: Oh, Lord, my God, your promises are ever-sure! Keep my focus on you, no matter what tries to pull me away, until you call me to your side in heaven. Amen.**

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