

Jesus first appeared to a woman after his resurrection.

He could just as easily have appeared to Simon Peter and John—but he did not.

He chose to appear to Mary Magdalene.

A woman.

And not just any woman, but Mary—someone whose past did not make her an obvious choice in the eyes of the world—not because she was a prostitute as some argue but because when Jesus encountered her, he cast out 7 demons from her. She was someone who had known struggle, but who had been healed by Jesus. She followed him faithfully all the way to the cross when others fled.

She is the one who comes to the tomb early, while it is still dark—both literally and spiritually. She is grieving. She is not expecting resurrection. She is coming to tend to a body, to do one last act of love.

And when she sees that the stone has been removed, her first assumption is not hope—it is loss. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,” she says. Even when the miracle has already happened, she cannot yet see it.

That feels very human.

Peter and John run to the tomb. They see the linen wrappings. They begin to understand that something has happened—but they go home.

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Mary stays. She remains in that place of confusion and grief, weeping outside the tomb. And it is there—in that place of tears—that Jesus comes to her.

But she does not recognize him.

She thinks he is the gardener.

Which, in a way, is beautifully fitting. Because in the resurrection, God is making a new creation. The garden is beginning again.

Still, she does not know him—until he speaks her name.

“Mary.”

And in that moment, everything changes.

Recognition comes not through sight, but through relationship. Through being known.

And then Jesus does something extraordinary.

He sends her.

“Go to my brothers and say to them...”

Mary Magdalene becomes the first person commissioned to proclaim the resurrection.

The first evangelist.

The first preacher of Easter.

Before Peter.

Before John.

Before any of the others.

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A woman is entrusted with the good news that changes the world.
She is an apostle to the apostles.

That matters.

It matters because in the world of that time, a woman's testimony was not considered reliable in a court of law. If you were trying to invent a convincing story, this is not how you would write it.

But the gospel is not concerned with human expectations.

God chooses whom God chooses.

And again and again in scripture, God chooses the ones the world might overlook—the ones who are present, who are faithful, who are willing.

Mary stays.

Mary weeps.

Mary listens.

And Mary is sent.

And what does she do?

“She went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord.’”

Not a theological treatise.

Not a perfectly crafted argument.

Just a simple, powerful witness:

“I have seen the Lord.”

That is the heart of evangelism.

And I know that word can make Episcopalians a little nervous.

We tend to think of evangelism as something loud or uncomfortable—something that belongs to someone else, somewhere else.

But here is what it looks like in John’s gospel:

It looks like Mary, overwhelmed with joy, telling the truth about what she has experienced.

“I have seen the Lord.”

In just a few moments, we will renew our baptismal covenant. And in that covenant, we promise something very important:

We promise to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.”

That is not a suggestion. It is a commitment.

And it is rooted right here—in this moment, in this garden, with Mary Magdalene.

Because from the very beginning, the resurrection has been something meant to be shared.

Let me tell you a story.

A few years ago, I met Beth. Beth had been invited to church by a friend. Not pressured. Not argued with. Just invited.

Beth told me, “I didn’t really want to go. But my friend said, ‘It’s important to me, and I’d love for you to come with me.’ So I went.”

And what she encountered was not what she expected.

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She found a community that welcomed them.
She heard words of grace that spoke to something deep in her life. She began to see herself differently—not as someone defined by her mistakes, but as someone loved by God.

And over time, her life began to change.

Not all at once.

Not perfectly.

But truly.

And when I asked her what made the difference, she didn't point to a sermon or a program. She said, "Someone cared enough to invite me."

That's it.

That's evangelism. It is not about having all the answers. It is not about saying everything perfectly. It is about sharing what you have seen. It is about saying, in your own way: "Come and see."
"I have seen the Lord."

Here's another story.

A woman I worked with named Susan once told me about a time in her life when everything had fallen apart. A relationship had ended, her work felt uncertain, and she described herself as feeling "completely untethered."

And in that season, someone from her church simply showed up.

They brought meals.

They sat with her in silence.

They prayed when she couldn't.

And she said, “I didn’t have the words for it at the time, but looking back, that’s when I started to believe again. Not because someone explained God to me—but because someone showed me what God’s love looked like.” That person from her church was what we are all called to be—the hands and feet of Christ.

That is proclamation too. Not just with words—but with lives.

Mary Magdalene goes and tells the others. And because she does, the story spreads. Because she speaks, others come to believe.

Because she shares, the good news moves beyond the garden and into the world.

And here we are, all these years later, because someone kept telling that story. So the question for us this Easter morning is not just, “Do we believe in the resurrection?”

It is also:

Will we share it?

Will we live as people who have seen the Lord?

Will we speak, in whatever ways we can, about the love we have encountered?

Because the world is still full of people standing in the dark, like Mary at the tomb.

People who are grieving.

People who feel lost.

People who cannot yet see hope.

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And what they need is not necessarily a perfect explanation.

They need someone to say:

“You are not alone.”

“There is hope.”

“Let me tell you what I have seen.”

And here is the beautiful truth:

You do not have to have a dramatic story to share.

You do not have to have everything figured out.

If you have known even a glimpse of God’s love—

in prayer,

in community,

in forgiveness,

in hope—

then you already have something to say.

Because Easter is not just something we celebrate.

It is something we carry.

It is something we proclaim.

It is something we live.

So this morning, with Mary Magdalene, with the first evangelist,
we say:

“I have seen the Lord.”

And we go—into our homes, our workplaces, our neighborhoods,
our relationships—to share that love.

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Not perfectly.

But faithfully.

Not loudly.

But truthfully.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Amen.