

The Other Mary goes back to Galilee

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, April 7th, 2023 - Matthew 28: 1-10)

My name is Mary, I am one of the Mary's who found themselves at the tomb of Jesus early in the morning.

There were a few of us - Mary from Bethany, Mary from Magdala, Mary who was Jesus' mother, some other women and me.

We all had met Jesus at various times in his life.

Mary, his mother of course, was at the beginning of his life. She was there at Cana and at Calvary. From the beginning she knew he would be special, even suspected his life would be cut short.

Mary from Bethany, part of the family of his dear friends with whom he stayed often. She anointed his feet one night with very expensive perfume, another time instead of helping her sister Martha, she sat at his feet as he taught, and what's more he encouraged it. When her brother Lazarus died, he shared her grief.

And then Mary from Magdala, she had been cured from a horrible disease and like many of us she had become a follower and helped fund Jesus' ministry.

We all had had significant encounters with Jesus. There were so many of us that people get confused as to who is who. However, Jesus showed us a truer way to live, he showed us compassion, understanding and welcomed us into his group despite our gender and our backgrounds.

We had watched the whole horrific scene play out – from that last Passover dinner, through betrayal, denial, horror, duplicity, a sham trial, that agonizing death and the burial. It was like a horror movie, the injustice and the indignity of it all.

Mary from Magdala and I had followed Joseph to the tomb and watched as Jesus was buried and the stone placed across the entrance. That's how we knew where the tomb was. What we didn't know was how they had added extra security, a couple of guards. As we sat at the tomb watching Joseph, I think all our hopes and dreams slowly disappeared as well, buried with him in that tomb.

The next day was the Sabbath, we could not go to worship – we were just too broken. So, we just sat around talking and thinking and crying about all that had happened. We spent all day wondering about what we would do next, go back home perhaps? We knew we couldn't abandon Jesus, not yet anyway, he never abandoned us, he always stood by us, showed us more dignity than we had ever known.

I think we were initially pretty angry at the fellows, they had just fled, deserted both Jesus and his way, but maybe they had their reasons. Maybe that was how they dealt with grief, maybe they were really frightened and thought they would be next to be

arrested and tried, after all Peter had already been recognized as a follower. Maybe they needed some kind of income now and had to go back to their family businesses. Maybe like us they had lost hope and wondered what the last three years had been about.

That night, an awful storm blew up, all night it went, trees down, damage and destruction everywhere. Never dreamt it would dislodge that heavy stone at the tomb. It had died down by dawn and we decided to go back to the tomb and pay our final respects before we returned to our lives in Galilee. We went under the cover of darkness though, we didn't need to be seen, two women out by themselves in the middle of the night!

We couldn't believe our eyes when we got there, the guards completely shaken up, the stone rolled away and an angel or messenger telling us not to be afraid – what!!

When we told Mary his mother, she said the same thing had happened to her before Jesus was born – a messenger appeared and told her not to be afraid.

Anyway, the messenger had more to say, they knew why we were there, they said Jesus had been raised (we did remember Jesus saying something along these lines but hadn't really taken much notice at the time). The messenger invited us to come and see for ourselves, we did but very nervously, was this a trap? But wait there was more, go quickly and tell the disciples about this – well we didn't even know where they had scattered to. There was more, go back to Galilee and you will see Jesus.

Well, we had already decided to go back to Galilee, back home, but could it be true we would see Jesus again. We knew we would at the final resurrection but now?

We left pretty much straight away, pretty scared, but also with a little glimmer of hope – perhaps the messenger was right. Our hearts were a little lighter as we followed the instructions.

Back to Galilee, back to where it all started, what would that mean? Back to Galilee, was that where the disciples had fled to?

Along the way we heard a familiar voice, the voice said 'Greetings'. Could it be? Were we hearing things? Were our minds and our grief playing tricks on us? Was it really Jesus? He sensed our fear and not for the first time he told us not to be afraid. We didn't want to let him go, we couldn't let him go again, but he urged us on. Don't be afraid, he said, go and find the others and tell them to get back to Galilee and they will see me. Really? Was it possible?

We know now that we were the first witnesses to the most marvelous experience, greater than anything we had experienced thus far. Our friend, our teacher, our Lord was alive, just like he said he would be, if we had only listened. He had trusted us with truths before, but this was the greatest truth and he entrusted it to us, to two women with shady pasts.

Our fear was becoming more like awe. First, he had freed us, and we had followed and now, well amazing.

We had followed him through thick and thin for about three years and for some reason we followed the instructions of the messenger.

It was in following that call that we encountered Jesus again, and again he changed our world.

Don't be afraid, follow your calling. Amen.