

Back to Galilee

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on April 5th, 2026 – Matthew 28:1-10)

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Two women waking early, after spending the day before consumed by grief, wondering how it could all have gone so horribly wrong, under the cover of darkness and just as the dawn is breaking, probably full of fear, wondering who might see them and what they might do, cannot stay away, cannot abandon even in death the man who changed their lives forever.

As the sun is coming up, Mary of Magdala (from Galilee) and her friend also called Mary had been devoted followers of Jesus, they had offered him hospitality and witnessed all he did – the teaching, the healing, the feeding, the parade through the streets on a donkey, the betrayal and denial, the shame of the trial, the sentencing and horrendous death. They had watched from a distance and then followed them to the burial site, that was how they were able to find it again that morning.

We know from Luke's gospel who Mary of Magdala is, Jesus had healed her from what tormented her, we have painted her as a scarlet woman, but we don't really know that. The other Mary could have been anyone of a number, maybe Jesus' mother or aunt, or the wife of Cleopas, or Mary of Bethany or someone else. It doesn't really matter who it was, all we know is that these women were devoted followers of Jesus and couldn't abandon him.

They had stood at the cross and then no doubt spent the Sabbath confused, wondering where the disciples had gone – (they had fled, most probably fearful for their own lives), in disbelief that this is how it all ends, fearful as to what would happen next, waiting for what would come next, consumed by grief and sadness – they had just lost the one who had turned their lives upside down, the one who had shown them love, forgiveness and care. Devoted followers who just couldn't leave him, the very least they could do was go to the tomb and perform whatever ritual they needed to do and perhaps say a final farewell.

As they neared the tomb, it wasn't just the dawn breaking that was shedding light, there was a messenger. The guards put there to guard the tomb, were scared stiff and the tomb was empty.

I suspect fear and confusion overtook them again. Having thought this was the end they then received some instructions.

1. Don't be afraid – how many times had Jesus said that to them.
2. Go and tell the others, the disciples that Jesus has been raised.
3. And tell them that Jesus will go ahead of them to Galilee.

What would they do next? We are told that they leave with fear and joy, maybe a different kind of fear, more like awe and joy.

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They leave to go and find the scattered disciples, to tell them this isn't the end, but perhaps a new beginning. Where would they even begin to find them?

On the way to do as instructed, they are met by the Risen Christ, they can't believe it, they want to hold onto him forever, never let him out of their sight again. They still cannot abandon him and their response to being with him again is one of devotion, to worship him. I wonder if he says to them, just like you haven't abandoned me, I am not about to abandon you either.

Jesus tells them they must leave, and again those words of comfort – don't be afraid, and he repeats the instructions of the messenger – go and tell the disciples, not just the brothers who seem to have fled, but the sisters too, and tell them all to go back to Galilee.

These two women, certainly Mary of Magdala, had most likely come from the Galilee region. Jesus was telling them to go back home. Jesus was telling them to go back to where it all began. Jesus was telling them to retrace their steps. Go back to where their lives were changed the first time.

But the task was more than that, they were being asked to get the band back together, to regroup, to gather the scattered community. Jesus is telling them to go back to a place that would be safer for them for a while, to regroup and together try and understand what has happened and remember what Jesus had said previously and to then wait together.

On this Resurrection Day these women remind us of what is important, central to our faith.

- Even if we flee the love and forgiveness of Jesus, Jesus will never abandon us.
- It is in following the call, the commands of Jesus that we encounter the Risen Lord. As we live lives of faith, as we put love and forgiveness into practice we just might meet the Risen Lord again and again. Faith needs to be put into action, we need to do something, we can't just sit still, comfortable that we have 'faith'. In the doing we will see the face of Christ in all the people we meet.
- Sometimes going back to the very beginning helps us to see it in a new light. As we retrace our steps of faith, we will see it in a new light. As we go back to our beginning, we will be able to re-member the encounters we have had with Jesus, how he indeed changed our lives. Maybe the time is right to go back and read the gospels from the very beginning and see Jesus again, maybe in a new light. Marcus Borg, a theologian wrote a book called 'Meeting Jesus Again for the Very

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First Time', maybe this is what it means to go back to Galilee, for these women, for the wider group of disciples, for us.

- Finally, we encounter the Risen Christ in the midst of community. It is in the midst of community, of being together, that we will discover Jesus, our Risen Lord and what it means to follow him.

Happy Easter. Christ is Risen, he is Risen indeed. May you encounter him again and again in your lives. Amen.