

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Empty Tomb and Mary Magdalene****Lesson: John 20:1-18**

Today is Easter. Our 40 days of Lenten journey ended yesterday, and today starts the season of Easter. How was your Lenten season? This year's Lent was particularly special to me because we were able to do many things in person that we had previously done online or skipped due to the pandemic.

During this Lenten season, we were able to learn for 5 weeks through Adam Hamilton's book *Luke* how Jesus comforted and loved outsiders, outcasts, and outlaws. I received a lot of positive feedback about the book as well. I hope we can feel God's grace through a good Lenten book again next Lent, and above all, I pray that more parishioners will show interest and participate next year than this year's Lent.

And last Sunday was Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. Starting with Palm Sunday, the journey of Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection began. On Thursday, we had a Maundy Thursday Service at Deer Park, and this time we attempted hand washing during the worship service. Through hand washing, we all had the opportunity to feel God's love and grace, and we all received Jesus' new command, "Love one another." As Jesus has loved us, I pray that we can also love one another. I received feedback that the worship service was beautiful, but also that the water was a little cold when washing hands. I hope to use warm water to wash the hands of the congregations during the Maundy Thursday worship service next year.

At the Good Friday Service, the Methodist Bell Choir performed the hymn "Were You There?" and it was so beautiful. I am always proud of our Bell Choir.

Yesterday, on Holy Saturday, Faith Family UMC had a pancake breakfast event, and I want to express my gratitude to the Faith Family congregation who lovingly served everyone there. One funny thing that happened was when I put ketchup on my scrambled eggs and sausage after putting pancakes on my plate, and some of the congregation members reacted like this way. In Korea, there is a dish called Omelet Rice, which is fried rice covered with egg and topped with a special sauce or ketchup. So, putting ketchup on eggs is familiar to me.

After having a pancake breakfast at church, my family and I went to the Emerald Community for an Easter Egg Hunt. We registered Evan for the event and received

a raffle ticket for the bikes that were prepared as prizes. There were many bikes by size, and buckets were placed in front of each bike for the raffle tickets. We placed our raffle ticket in the bucket for the bike that was suitable for Evan and waited for the time of the raffle. As the raffle began and the kids started receiving the bikes, our excitement grew. We hoped the bike would go to a child who needed it, but we were inwardly hoping it would be Evan. I was looking forward to hearing that "First name starts with E, last name M." However, they said, "First name starts with S, are you here?"

The Sunrise Service by the youth to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ this morning at 7 a.m. was also beautiful. In many ways, this year's Lenten season was meaningful not only to me, but also to our parish.

Also, come to think of it, this year's Easter has a lot of significance because it is our first in-person Easter service since the pandemic. Two years ago, we were still in the midst of the pandemic and had to hold Zoom services. Last year, my family and I got Covid, so we had to conduct Easter service via Zoom.

In that sense, let's say Easter greetings: "Christ Is Risen!" "Christ Is Risen Indeed!"

If I were to summarize today's Easter message in two points, the first would be "The risen one is no longer in the tomb." And the second would be "The first true disciple of Jesus was a woman." If it's hard to remember, at least remember the keywords "empty tomb" and "woman disciple" when you go home.

John 20 starts this way: "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."

On Thursday, Jesus had the Last Supper with his disciples and washed their feet. Later, he was arrested by soldiers. On Friday, Jesus suffered and was eventually crucified and died. In Judaism, the Sabbath refers to the period from Friday evening to Saturday evening. After Jesus was taken to the tomb, everyone observed the Sabbath.

The name Mary appears several times in the Bible. It seems that Mary was a very common name at that time. For example, Jesus' mother was also named Mary, and the sister of Lazarus and Martha was also named Mary. However, surprisingly, the word "Magdalene" follows the name Mary in this case. Note that at that time, the Israelites did not have last names. Therefore, people at that time used to distinguish someone's name by referring to the name of the area they lived in or by calling

them someone's son or daughter such as Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, Mary Magdalene means Mary from the area of Magdalene.

So why was Mary Magdalene distinguished from other Marys? It was because she was directly related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene was a woman who had suffered from seven evil spirits and diseases, but was healed by Jesus and reborn into a new life.

Knowing the love and grace she received from Jesus, Mary was by his side even during his crucifixion. After the Sabbath ended, she hurried to Jesus' tomb early in the morning to check if his body was still there and to apply frankincense to prevent his body from decaying, despite her anxiety as it had been three days since Jesus died.

However, when she saw Jesus' tomb from afar, the stone blocking the tomb was already removed from the entrance.

Because being called a disciple or friend of Jesus at that time meant being executed like him when he was crucified, everyone in Jerusalem denied Jesus and was afraid to go near his tomb. So Mary thought that one of Jesus' disciples had removed the stone to keep his body, and told Peter and the other disciple about it.

When Jesus was with his disciples, he had already promised several times that he would rise from the dead, but none of them understood what Jesus' resurrection meant.

After Peter and the other disciple visited Jesus' tomb and went home, Mary stood alone at Jesus' empty tomb, worried and weeping for him. She looked at the tomb again to see if it was really empty. Then, two angels in white clothes, who were not there before, were sitting inside the tomb. And the two angels asked Mary why she was crying. Even the resurrected Jesus himself asked Mary why she was crying. But Mary still did not realize, like the other disciples, that Jesus had risen from the dead.

However, when Jesus approached Mary and called her name "Mary," she finally realized that it was his voice, the voice of the Jesus she loved and followed. She looked at him and called him "Rabboni (Teacher)." Mary, who met the resurrected Jesus, had a conviction of resurrection. She experienced that Jesus truly rose from the dead. And no longer did she mourn at the tomb, but she ran straight to the disciples to tell them the news of the resurrection. Through her, the news of Jesus'

resurrection spread. Therefore, the first disciple to experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ was Mary Magdalene.

Friends, how do you think Mary felt when she saw the resurrected Jesus? She probably felt overjoyed, and she would have accepted the resurrected Jesus as her Christ. Through the resurrected Jesus, Mary would have gained a conviction of resurrection, and would no longer have felt sad or afraid because she realized that death was not the end of life.

Jesus came to this earth and experienced all the hardships and insults that a human can face. He even experienced death. If Jesus' death had been the end of his journey, his disciples would have regretted following him and denied him for the rest of their lives. However, Jesus overcame everything through his resurrection. Jesus proved through his resurrection that even death could not stop him.

Therefore, an empty tomb signifies the resurrection of Jesus. At the same time, Jesus' resurrection brought Mary, who was grieving in the tomb, out of the tomb, and gave her and the disciples the conviction that Jesus had risen indeed. Including Mary, the disciples who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus believed in the resurrection on this earth, hoped for resurrection, and began to live a life of resurrection.

I would like to define Christians as those who believe in the resurrection of Christ, those who are no longer staying at Jesus' tomb, and those who live a life of resurrection on this earth. Living a life of resurrection means living with the assurance of Christ's resurrection. It means overcoming all the worries, concerns, pains, and even the fear of death that may come to us in life by relying on and expecting the resurrection of Christ.

I hope that you become true Christians. I hope that you believe in the resurrection of Christ. I hope that you no longer stay in the tomb of your life. I hope that you live with the conviction of your own resurrection, including the resurrection of Christ.

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Amen.