

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**Homily by Pastor Donald Shenk**

(Delivered on Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017)

**Text: John 20:1-18** (From Ralph Milton's "The Lectionary Story Bible")

Mary of Magdala had been one of Jesus' friends.

Mary didn't run away when the rulers killed Jesus. She and some of the other women disciples stayed near Jesus all the time that he hung on the cross.

Mary wanted so much to help Jesus. But the soldiers wouldn't let her.

Now Jesus was dead. Mary felt as if she had died, too.

Early on Sunday morning, on the third day after Jesus had been killed, Mary went to the place where they had put Jesus' dead body. But when she got there, she saw that Jesus' body was gone.

Mary was very upset. She ran to call some of Jesus' other disciples. They came running as fast as they could. They, too, saw that Jesus' dead body wasn't there anymore.

Jesus' other disciples didn't know what to do, so they went home. Mary stayed behind. She wanted to be by herself for a while. She wanted to have a good cry. Mary was very sad about all the things that had happened to Jesus.

While she was crying, she looked into the place where they had put Jesus' body. She saw two angels. The angels asked her, "Why are you crying?"

"They have taken Jesus away," said Mary. "And I don't know where they have put him."

Then Mary turned around, and she saw somebody standing there. She was still crying, and the tears in her eyes made it hard for her to see who it was.

"Who are you looking for?" this person asked. "And why are you crying?"

Mary cried even harder. "If you have taken Jesus away, please tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary," he said.

As soon as she heard her name, she knew who it was.

"Teacher!" she shouted. She was so happy. Jesus had been dead, but now He was alive again!

"Go and tell the other disciples," said Jesus. "Tell them that I am going to live with God."

So Mary of Magdala went running just as fast as she could - running and jumping and shouting because she was so happy.

Jesus was alive again!

Homily by Pastor Donald: **"Every Day a Resurrection"**

Rejoicing in this day of resurrection, we have come to celebrate the strength of God's love—a love that triumphs even over death. God's steadfast love endures forever.

Death never gets the final word. Alleluia Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed!

This, my friends, is a day of new beginnings. Our God is making all things NEW!

As I approached our glorious scripture for today; this story, which springs anew each year and reminds us of the hope that springs forth even from the darkest places, I was impressed by how much our God loves newness.

Each day, no matter what the circumstances of our lives or what has happened in the far or even most recent past, our God gives us the opportunity to resurrect. With the dawn of each new day, God gives each of us a chance to begin anew, to spring forth from the tombs of our past and to embrace that new thing that God is creating. "Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth!"

God, right at our back, rolls the stone away each day and allows the light to shine forth from deep inside. "This is who you might have been, this is who you think you were, this is what you can't forgive yourself for doing, being or thinking," God says, "but I'm here shining the light anyway. I'm here offering you forgiveness and new life. I'm here offering you the possibility of resurrection and joy. Come forth, step out, embrace the beauty of who I created you to be and walk in the light from this day and forever more.

"Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see!"

How I love that song. Each morning as I rise in what sometimes seems like the crypt of my bedroom, beset oftentimes with nightmares, entombed by the anxieties that riddle my brain in the twilight of my sleeping, I realize with great relief that I'm all right. That God has created me anew. That I have resurrected from the grave of insecurity and worry and that God was with me in that time, too.

And, oh, what joy comes in the morning. What blessed assurance and sweet sustenance is received as I remember that God is always creating, always resurrecting, always making all things new. And that, as Easter most surely reminds us, death is never the end, light is always at hand and every day a resurrection is not only possible but assured.

In her article, "Escape From the Tomb" written by the amazing Barbara Brown Taylor for The Christian Century, Rev. Taylor tells of how, when she was a girl, she would line up treasures on her bed collected from the woods near where she lived: "fat flakes of mica, buckeyes bigger than shooter marbles, blue jay feathers, bird bones and -- if [she] was lucky -- a cicada shell, one of those dry brown bug bodies you can find on tree trunks when the 17-year locusts come out of the ground."

Barbara writes that she, "liked them for at least two reasons.

"First, because they were horrible looking, with their huge empty eye sockets and their six sharp little claws...[and also] because they were evidence that a miracle had occurred. They looked dead, but they weren't. They were just shells. Every one of

them had a neat slit down its back, where the living creature inside of it had escaped, pulling new legs, new eyes, new wings out of that dry brown body and taking flight.

“At night,” she writes, “I could hear them singing their high song in the trees. If you had asked them, I’ll bet none of them could have told you where they left their old clothes.”

This, I think is the possibility God holds out to us each and every moment of our lives, and not even just in the morning! Shed your old self, shed your old beliefs of not being my child of not being who I created you to be, of being sinful and shameful and less-than. Be resurrected. Leave those old ratty smelly clothes behind and put on this brightly shining new raiment I’m holding out just for you.

No matter how you’ve seen yourself before, you can see yourself now as I see you, resurrected, a child of the light, my child raised up, called forth and called out to show others how loved and beautiful they are and how we can resurrect the world together.

“Nearly 2,000 years separate us from Mary,” writes Dr. Ronald Goetz in his article for The Christian Century, “Mary and the Body Snatchers,” “yet we will go to church this Easter with many of the same expectations as she on the first Easter at the tomb. Everything our mutual worldliness -- Mary’s and our own -- has taught us leads us to believe we will find only death. And we will find the death, the living death, that our worldliness and sin and religiosity has wrought in us. Nevertheless, as Christ surprised Mary in the garden, he may also surprise us in the routine of the liturgy, the lections and hymns, perhaps even in the preaching. (although he may be stretching it there! :<)

“For despite our doubts and denials, our complacency and hedonism, [Christ] is alive. Even we First World Christians, we secular lords of the earth, know [Christ] is alive. He survives even us... How foolish of us to deny his resurrection or slay him anew, for we but deny and slay ourselves.”

Every year we celebrate this day as the Day of Resurrection, yet I know that our God sees the Christ in us and provides us the possibility of EVERY day a resurrection; even every moment of our lives.

“Come, live in the light, shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!”

Beyond death is abundant life.

Let us live it.

Beyond the shadows of hatred and isolation is the light that draws us into community.

Let us follow it.

Beyond the stone covered tomb is a dance called resurrection.

Let us move with it.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!  
Let us live in the resurrected Spirit of the Christ.

Amen.