

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, April 4, 2024

Today is Thursday, April 4 and we are exploring what the Bible says about the Risen Christ.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and blessed Lord, I long for you to speak into my life and circumstances. As I begin this time of prayer, I still my body, quiet my mind and slow my breathing. I inhale the joy and peace of your loving presence. I exhale the worries and concerns I have carried with me. Give me ears to hear, eyes to see and a heart to understand the good message you have for me today as I study your Holy Word. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). John 20:11-16

REFLECTION

This week following the celebration of Easter Sunday, we have been considering the empty tomb from the perspective of each of the four Gospel writers. Today we read from the Gospel of John. When the disciples hear that Jesus' tomb is empty, Peter and John both start running. Athletic young men (as these fishermen likely were) sometimes instigate friendly competition. On the morning of Jesus' resurrection there is an impromptu footrace. In his Gospel, John records himself as the faster of the two and says he reached the tomb first, before Peter. I wonder if Peter had the same perspective. All they find at the graveside are the strips of linen that once wrapped Jesus' dead body. After the two men have gone, Mary Magdalene returns

In a tender account of caring compassion, the two angels and Jesus each ask Mary why she is crying. She mistakes Jesus for the gardener and does not recognize him until he calls her by name - Mary. She immediately recognizes the voice of her Savior. Whatever I am dealing with at this particular time in my life, whatever emotion I am feeling today, whatever concern is on my heart, I name it before Jesus. When I experience disappointment, grief, loss, confusion, uncertainty, fear, or worry, I can count on Jesus to hear my lonely cries. Just as he spoke to Mary, he is speaking to me. He calls me by name in the early morning sunlight of a dawning day. I only need to turn towards him. He is here.

I consider how the encounter with Mary at the tomb informs my life and circumstances. Perhaps there is an answer to a prayer or a solution to a problem. Maybe God wants to help me get in

touch with my emotions and find the comfort of his nearness and concern. Perhaps God is opening a new door for me and guiding me on a good path. Jesus often shows up in surprising and unexpected ways. He wants to speak to me about my life. I am learning to hear his voice and follow his direction.

Ask: When do I overlook the presence of Jesus in my midst? How often do I neglect to turn away from the things of this world and turn toward him?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, when I recognize the emptiness of my heart without your loving presence, I cry for my loss and weep for my impoverished soul. I ache for the absence of your companionship and long to find you once more. Speak my name so I can hear the voice of my Shepherd. I turn to you in love and devotion. Enter the garden of my heart and call my name in the empty stillness. Remind me of your loving presence and allow me to hear your questioning voice of kind concern. I am thankful I am not alone in this world and am confident that nothing could ever separate me from your precious companionship. Let me feel your love, joy and peace and carry it with me throughout my day. Amen.