

# The Risen Christ Counseling Mary Magdalene's Heart

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**Bible Text:** John 20:11-18  
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From John 20 and we'll read verses 11 through 18 which will also be our text this evening. John 20, beginning at verse 11.

11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. 17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Thus far the reading of God's sacred word.

Let's turn now to the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 18, and as we read this Article on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, let's remember that Jesus was born, became Incarnate, in order to die in order to rise again. And so we are born now by nature to die but through the rebirth have the seed of his life in us so that he is the firstborn among many brethren, so when he arises, as we commemorate today, this is our guarantee that we shall arise also. So it all goes back to the Incarnation and ultimately back to eternity, of course.

Dear church family also live streaming in, one of the most precious descriptions of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament scriptures, especially considered when we look at his birth in Bethlehem, is Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful,

Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Those first two names in the original Hebrew probably are one, "his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor." He's wonderful in himself, of course, but he's particularly wonderful as a counselor, Isaiah says. Literally in Hebrew it could be translated "the wonder of a counsellor," and the Hebrew word "Wonder" here means something extraordinary, something superlative, marvelous, amazing. It's the same word used to describe God's miracles, his supernatural works that evoke fear and awe such as the plagues on Egypt.

Christ is such a wonder of a counselor, the kind of counselor that is just awe-inspiring. He spake with authority. The people could feel it. There was wisdom there beyond his years, or so they thought, and beyond who he was, Joseph's son, or so they thought. Today, of course, when we think of a counselor, we think of someone we pay to listen to our personal problems and hopefully they help us find some emotionally satisfying solution, or you might think of a pastor that you go to for help and wisdom. But in the ancient world, a counselor was a wise man who usually served in a court of a king, and he helped the king make wise plans and issue decrees to govern and defend his kingdom, as we read in Isaiah 19. And so kings needed a team of counselors. Daniel was one to the king of Babylon. Wise counselors is what they wanted. The book of Proverbs reminds us that we all should seek good advice from a multitude of counselors when we have important decisions to make. But King Jesus, counselor par excellence, the wonder of a counselor, Wonderful Counselor, needed no counselors, for he, himself, is the supreme counselor and that for two reasons. First, Isaiah tells us that he's the mighty God and God has infinite wisdom in himself. God says, "I need no counsel," Isaiah 40 tells us, but the Lord also, Isaiah 28 tells us, is wonderful in counsel and does wonderful things, "Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth."

So Jesus is the counselor who needs no counselors, the only King who needs no counselors around him. But secondly, this eternal person who has a divine nature was also born into this world, as we heard from Belgic Confession Article 18 tonight, with a fully human nature, and Isaiah tells us that God will anoint Christ's human nature with the Holy Spirit which is his own Spirit; that Spirit of wisdom and of counsel and understanding will rest upon him, be poured out in him without measure. And so Jesus is the perfect counselor and he's able to sympathize with all human weaknesses and problems. He's identified with all that we go through, sin excepted, and he has infinite resources of wisdom and grace to help us in every time of need. Therefore, just as the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon to listen to his wisdom and to marvel at his counsel and glory, so all the more we should come to Jesus Christ through faith in his word to listen to this counselor, to his wisdom, and to worship at his feet. And now that we commemorate him as the living counselor, the living wisdom of God at the right hand of the Father, we need by God's grace to choose him as our counselor, not to someone we have to pay to serve our purposes but the King who directs us to fulfill his purposes so that our goal would be, "Help me to live in accord with thy counsel, to fulfill thy purposes, and to live for thy glory." And at the same time, we should be praying that this wise counselor would fill us with his Holy Spirit, his own Spirit of wisdom and knowledge and counsel.

Now I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but Jesus had 10 resurrection appearances between the moment he arose from the grave and the moment he ascended into heaven, and in nearly all of them he is giving out amazing counsel in his exalted nature. I've been assigned four Lord's Days where between resurrection and ascension where I'm preaching for you, God willing, and if the Lord allows what I want to do in these four Lord's Days where I'm not preaching from the Catechism but preaching from the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, I want to look with you at Jesus as a counselor, tonight as he counseled Mary Magdalene, and a few weeks from now at how he counseled the women who were seeking Jesus, and then how he counseled the travelers to Emmaus, and then how he counseled Simon Peter. So this little miniseries of sermons, God willing, I want to title "Jesus, the Wonderful Resurrected Counselor," and tonight we just focused in on John 20:11-18, "The Risen Christ Counseling Mary Magdalene's Heart," and we'll look at that in four thoughts: his revelation to her heart, his conquering of her heart, his lesson for her heart, and his commission to her heart.

On Easter morning, neither the women traveling to the empty sepulcher nor the disciples that we heard about this morning behind closed doors understood how the cross lay at the very center of the plan of God. They didn't grasp the succinct explanation that we have of this in our Heidelberg Catechism, Question 40, with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction could be made for our sins no otherwise than by the death of the Son of God. It's hard to put ourselves in their shoes but for them Christ's death was a tremendous mystery and the cross a kind of mysterious stumbling-stone in their mind.

Their faith was shaken even though their love was still there, and so early on resurrection morning, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' sepulcher with several women, and when they came closer, you'll remember, they suddenly saw that the stone at the door's mouth was rolled away, and Mary runs immediately to bring word of this amazing theft or destruction or whatever it was, to Peter and to John. Meanwhile, of course, the other women who Mary accompanied came close to the sepulcher and they were met by two angels who told them Christ was not stolen but had risen from the dead. Mary was unaware of this, of course, so she returned to the sepulcher behind Peter and John who had run ahead of her, and by the time she got back they were already gone and Mary was left alone.

That's where our text begins tonight, verse 11, she stood without, without the sepulcher, outside of the sepulcher weeping. Weeping. The word "weeping" here is the strongest Greek word for wailing. It's what people were hired to do at funerals, to wail, to mourn the dead in an unrestrained manner. And the custom was, as you know, to take the tears and put them in a bottle and then give the loved one the bottle so they could say later, "This is how much my loved one was mourned." It was a Hebrew way of just profuse mourning. Mary is weeping and wailing the loss of her Lord. She came to anoint his dead body, she grieved that he's no longer alive, and now she can't even have the privilege of serving her Master's dead body. It seemed like everything was taken away from her life.

He had cured her from being possessed by several demons. She owed everything to Jesus. He was her Savior. He was her Lord. He was all and now he was nowhere. Sorrow,

sorrow over sin can be unspeakably great but sorrow over missing Jesus can even be more profound. That's what Mary was experiencing now, but in her love, somehow she couldn't do what Peter and John did or the other women did and leave the sepulcher. She just had to be there. She could not go away.

She stood without and the word "stood" here is an interesting Greek word too. It's the Greek word that implies a guard stationed at a post. It's as if she stations herself as Christ's guardian. She's going to keep vigil even when the body is missing. Love for Jesus made her linger around the empty tomb. You see, where true love is in exercise, the child of God resolves to adhere to Christ from the heart in all circumstances, even when we cannot find him.

And finally Mary does what she probably should have done earlier, she stoops down and she looks into the sepulcher and she sees two angels. Verse 11b, "as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre," and lo and behold, "two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain," verse 12. Now what is most remarkable here is that Mary is not afraid, at least we don't read of her being afraid. Almost every other time in the Bible when people meet angels, they're overcome with fear. Mary almost has a low-key response to the angels. Her anxiety about missing Jesus, the body of Jesus, is so great there's almost no room for her to take in the amazing thing she was witnessing and she properly understood and believed what Christ had spoken before. She would have wept if she had found his body there because he had already told his disciples that he would be raised on the third day. You see, the empty tomb and the angels sitting within it should have brought back to her mind the promise of Jesus, "I will be raised on the third day."

So right at this point you almost want to shake Mary, don't you? You want to say, "Don't you see it, Mary? He's not stolen, he's raised from the dead, salvation is merited, justice is paid, sin is conquered, death is conquered, hell is conquered, the Father's amen upon the finished work of Jesus has been pronounced. Every enemy is defeated. Don't you understand, Mary?" But Mary doesn't understand. It wasn't that she was living in unbelief, it was that she just didn't understand.

So the angels ask her, "Why are you weeping?" And Mary says, "They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they've laid him." Now spiritually today you can get in such a, the old Puritans called it, spiritual melancholy where you just can't find the Lord. You cry and sigh like Job, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him." Or like Mary, it's just like, "My Lord is gone. He's taken away." Or like the bride in the Song of Solomon who went through the streets and said, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" I wonder, my friend, if you know something of that experientially yourself, you know the struggle of not being able to lay hold of God in Christ whom you love. That can be a great grief in our lives when we can't find our precious Savior back, as it were. But as a physician on a battlefield first helps the soldiers whose wounds are the deepest, so Christ is on his way to help Mary in his first resurrection appearance. Isn't it interesting she's the one who stands the latest beside him at the cross, it seems, on Friday night, and she's the first he appears to on Lord's Day morning, Easter morning.

Well, as Mary Magdalene is unbosoming her heart to the angels, she becomes aware that there's a presence behind her and she turns around. And it's Jesus. It's Jesus but she doesn't know it. Jesus was standing there, verse 14 says, and she "knew not that it was Jesus." Now how is that possible? Three days before she knew him very well. How does she not recognize him after being years with him? Well, she's so filled with sorrow, so caught up in the bands of her distress, so looking for his dead fleshly body, she fails to recognize him now in his new powers, his new majesty. She didn't recognize him of whom Paul says that he would be known no more after the flesh but only as the head of the new creation. She was seeking the living among the dead.

But here comes the Counselor, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" These are great counseling questions. When someone comes to a pastor for counsel, this is one of the first, these are some of the first questions you ask. You say, "Well, why are you sad and what's wrong? And what are you really seeking in life? Whom are you seeking?" You get to know a person when you ask these two questions, "What burdens you and what are you looking for in life?" You see, Jesus is this great Counselor who doesn't just come and speak into the situation but he sees Mary weeping and he says, "I want to draw her out." A good counselor is someone who draws you out.

So Mary unbosoms her heart a third time, first she did to Peter and John, then to the angels, but now to Christ and says again, "My Lord is taken away. I don't know where they've laid him." But she thinks Jesus is the gardener and she has no expectation from a gardener but she does say to him with maybe just a faint hope, that if he could tell her where he has laid him, she would come and take him away, verse 15.

Then there must be just a little pause between verse 15 and 16 and why? Well, because as the gardener pauses, Mary despairs of a satisfactory answer and she turns away from Christ, she had turned to him and she turns her back to him again and looks into the empty sepulcher again. And we know that because in both verse 14 and verse 16, if you notice, she turned herself to Christ. So in between those two she turned herself away again. Puritan George Hutchinson has a wonderful comment on this. He says saints may turn their back even on a present Christ while he is not discerned by them. Sometimes Christ is very near to us and he's communicating with us and we don't even realize it and we turn our backs on him again, and don't take his word seriously, and don't take it to heart, and don't appropriate it.

But you see, here Mary has to learn an even deeper lesson. It's a very deep lesson. She must go lost as a seeking soul despite her love and despite her spices in herself. This good Counselor is going to teach her to find everything in him as the perfect, supreme, all-sufficient Counselor. So Mary must end in the grave. She must turn back to the grave, figuratively speaking, with all that is of self. She must descend with Jesus, as it were, into the grave. We must be planted together with him in the likeness of his death, the Bible says, and she experiences that here and now. There in the grave the Lord no longer lies and hence all communion ceases, and if communion with Christ ceases, then all is cut off for her. She has nowhere else to go. There's nothing left but the dark despairing

sepulcher, and worst of all, Mary feels not only that she must die with Christ but also that she must die without Christ.

So standing with her back to the Prince of life, Mary never feels so far, at least not for a long time, so far from God and so far from Christ even as God in Christ is now never so near. And what a lesson that is. Sometimes we think God is far away when he's dealing with us and emptying us, and is actually very near to us. Our extremity is God's opportunity and when seeking sinners are cut off from all their own righteousness they must descend into a hellish grave before God, the gates of heaven are thrown open and that's what happens here. The greater Joseph, the perfect Counselor, the Lord Jesus Christ can no longer refrain himself from pouring into this poor sinner's wounds his own blood balm of Gilead.

"Jesus saith unto her," verse 16, "Mary." Mary. The name Mary is a beautiful name. It's a compound of two Hebrew words. It means "exalted by the Lord." How fitting. How fitting is this name for Mary. She was possessed by demons, she's now by grace exalted by the Lord, and she's exalted in a double way because now she's exalted to be the first to whom the resurrected Christ appears, and Mary would be the first to say, "That's not because of anything of me. This is just pure sovereign grace."

But Mary was also pronounced by Jesus in a very tender way, in a compassionate way. We can't catch the tone of voice on the page but we can catch it in our imagination. Mary is weeping, wailing, she's overwhelmed, she's helpless, hopeless. She looks into the sepulcher, everything speaks of death, and Jesus says with holy familiarity and with holy tenderness and holy compassion, "Mary." And she recognizes, she cannot but recognize his voice. It's a word of comfort. It's a word of forgiveness. It's a word full of grace. A familiar word. A word spoken with reverence, with tenderness, with meaning, but also a word spoken with authority. There was something of authority in that tenderness because now it's pronounced by the exalted King of kings. Just as Dr. Kuivenhoven said this morning, the common greeting, "Peace be unto thee," was not common in this situation, just to have a bare common meaning. It had a deep meaning. "Peace. All health, all salvation, all welfare be unto you." So in the very pronouncing of her name there was an authority there that came from the exalted King to whom all power is given in heaven and earth, that made Mary turn, as it were.

Just one word but everything was in that one word, a word of divine self-disclosure. She realized it was him, Jesus, he who was dead is now alive. "Mary." It brought back a flood of memories from this Counselor's lips, memories of her sin, memories of his grace, memories of his counsel. "Mary." It was too good to be true. She had hope for a dead Jesus but now the living Jesus was calling her. She had hoped to serve his body but now he was serving her soul. He was taking her from Marah to Elam. What a fountain of comfort she found in the simple pronouncement of her name by the exalted King of kings.

And she noticed, no doubt, that he just said, "Mary." He didn't say, "Mary Magdalene," for her life of Magdalene, her life of prostitution or whatever else it was, was forgiven. It

was all buried in the empty sepulcher. She had had so much grief over her sins in her life but now it's as if Jesus said in this one word, "Mary," said it as a counselor, "I won't bother you anymore about your past, your Magdalene past." Mary from Magdalene, a place of prostitution. "My Father is satisfied with what I have done for you, Mary. For the rest of your life, though you may be bothered at times with your past, I will never be the one to bother you. I have washed your sins away. You too, like the Father, have every right to be satisfied with my satisfaction for your sins." And what a lesson that is from this Counselor. You know, when you counsel true children of God and they can't lay hold of forgiveness, this is one of the best things you could say to them, "The Father in heaven is satisfied with the cleansing blood of his own Son. Why are not you? Why are not you?"

"Mary." Mary can now say like John could say on the sea of Tiberius with Jesus standing on the shore, "It's the Lord! It's the Lord! It's the voice of my Beloved!" Her eyes go open. She turns back again to him and she cries out, "Rabboni, my Master, my teacher. You're not just a gardener, a spiritual gardener no less, but you are a Counselor, you are the planter, the sower, the reaper of my heart, in that sense you're a true gardener, but you're more. You're my Savior, my Lord, my Master, my Counselor. Rabboni." Mary's heart is conquered. Jesus reveals himself to her and in the revelation he conquers her.

Pastor Moody Steward says one word brings before her Jesus, all that he has done on her behalf, all that he has been to her, all that he is in his own loveliness. One word changes tears of sorrow into tears of joy. One word delivers her soul from captive bands. With one word she experiences Isaiah 54:7, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee but with great mercies will I gather thee."

Well, the Mary who was planted together with him in the likeness of his death was now planted together with him in the likeness of his resurrection. Spiritually inside of her, the word Mary was like the word, "Lazarus, come forth," physically and Lazarus was resurrected and came forth. Her soul, as it were, may I say it with reverence, was resurrected within her. She turns herself, "Rabboni," she says, "which is to say, Master." Teacher Master. Counselor Master, you could translate it. It's so rich.

Now she stands with her back to death, with her back to the sepulcher, and her face to Jesus. She breaks forth in a cry of mingled tenderness, mingled reverence, and devotion, and astonishment, and ecstasy, and worship, and all rolled into one. "Rabboni, my Lord, my Master, my Teacher, my Counselor." With an outburst of worship and a heartfelt confession of loyalty, Mary cries out a special name for Jesus, "Master. Teacher. Counselor. Counselor of my reason. Counselor of my conscience. Counselor of my affections. Counselor of my strength, my heart, my life." It's really a one word prayer, a prayer of adoration, a prayer of confession, a prayer of worship, a prayer of submission to this Counselor. "Rabboni." Master-less Mary receives her Master back. Counselor-less, if I can say that word, Mary receives her Counselor back. Savior-less Mary receives her Savior back. The Chief Prophet, the only High Priest, the eternal King makes himself known to Mary. It becomes Easter. "Rabboni." She's conquered. She believes. Her dead spices are of no use anymore. They are left behind at the grave. She embraces Christ as a

resurrection in life. She experiences the reality of what he had formerly said, "I live and you shall live also." Christ is for her now the living Amen of all God's promises.

She is absolutely conquered but Jesus' counseling is not done. He now has a huge challenging lesson for her heart, but we'll look at thoughts 3 and 4 briefly. Yes, this was a sacred moment, a moment that both Mary and Christ would never forget. God's people can have their sacred moments in life of communion with Jesus but you can't explain to anyone else, it could only scratch the surface. This was such a moment for Mary. There stands Jesus, there stands Mary. Jesus' bands are broken, the bands of death are broken. Mary's bands of sorrow are broken. Both are free. Both rejoice in each other. Christ is glad with his Mary. Mary is glad with her Counselor Rabboni.

So it's understandable that Mary now wants to fall at his feet, she wants to hold his feet as a symbol of reverence and love. Her heart was filled like the bride, "I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him and would not let him go." She thinks, no doubt, of the days before Golgotha. She thinks those days have returned. She thinks she can embrace him. She wants to preserve him the way she once knew him. But as she's about to reach out and embrace him, the Counselor stops her and immediately he gives her wise counsel. He has a profound lesson to teach her. Verse 17, "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren."

What an amazing lesson. Why was Mary Magdalene not allowed to touche him but Thomas was invited to do so, and the other women as we'll hear a few weeks from now, God willing, held him by his feet? A lot of ink has been spilled over trying to explain this but I believe you can boil it down to four interwoven reasons. The first is Christ knows how prone Mary would be to never let him go, but Mary must be weaned from his physical presence to end in higher spiritual communion alone as a preparation for his departure to the right hand of the Father. Jesus wants to warn her against an unholy familiarity and an unholy boldness that leans on his sensible physical presence. He wanted to make clear to Mary that the former mode of fellowship in which he lived in daily visible association with her and others would not be resumed; much as he had to teach his own mother that lesson, so he has to teach Mary Magdalene that lesson. But the good news is the fellowship will now be richer than ever by his Holy Spirit because a new age has now dawned. It would be the communion of the ascended Lord through the Spirit and through his church. As one old writer put it, Mary Magdalene was prone to think too much of Christ's humanity and too little of his divinity and Jesus wanted to, as the wise Counselor, put that into a better balance. She had to learn it was not his literal flesh but according to his Spirit that she had to worship him. As Paul says, we would no longer know him in the body but in the Spirit.

Secondly, Christ is hers forever Jesus wants to teach her as Counselor, but he must still do more for her. It's as if he says, "Mary, you act as if all is done, that we will never be separated again, but I must still return to my Father on your account, to my Father and your Father." And you see, here there's a great difference Mary Magdalene's attitude and Thomas' attitude. One of the Bonar brothers says it best, he says she believed too much, he too little. She was all faith, faith too hasty in its conclusions. He was all unbelief,



unbelief refusing to believe even that this was his Master. So Christ as a wise Counselor handles each case according to each case's need. Thomas needed an invitation to come and touch to confirm his faith. Christ stoops to his level. But Mary Magdalene is full of faith. She didn't really need to touch though she desired it. So Christ removed the prop of touch in order to forward her more into the spirituality of their relationship so she could live more by faith and less by sight.

Then thirdly, the urgency of delivering the gospel message. Jesus wanted to impress upon her she was the first to whom Christ revealed himself and so he says to her at the end of verse 17, "But go, go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Be not self-centered on me, Mary, but be other person centered. As you received the gospel, go proclaim it to your needy brethren." Similar to what we heard this morning. You see, Christ would have her realize the deep confession of the four leprous men who found great spoil and they said in 2 Kings 7:9, "this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us." Let's go and tell the good news. Well, that was physical food so Jesus says, "Go and tell the spiritual food, the spiritual good news, Mary, to the brethren."

Now the word "go" here is in that particular tense in the Greek language which is onward going. You could translate it, "But be going. But be going now, Mary. Don't tarry. Be on your way. The disciples need it badly." This is the call, you see, to every true believer, "Go and say. Don't hoard it, this rich Savior, this rich gospel to yourself." Going, that's such a case as this, is better than touching. Carrying Christ's message more honorable than staying at his side. When we experience fellowship, we must go tell, we must go witness. Fellowship is fruit eaten, witnessing is seed sown, the latter is greater than the former. They both have great value, they both are complementary to each other, but Jesus said, "I am the door. By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and shall go out, in and out, and find pasture." Our Heidelberg Catechism says it so well, by Christ we go out into the world praying to win others to Christ without godly conversation, Lord's Day 32. So if God has lighted your candle, you are called to let that light shine before men, not with a shallow kind of flippant false witnessing but with a true deep kind of witnessing, telling others of the beauty of the glory of Christ and what he has done for you.

Then fourthly, finally, Christ desires to test Mary's surrendering in love to further her own growth in grace so that Mary, herself, could fall away on all sides and Christ would really be everything. You see, when you really commune with Christ, your greatest desire is to obey him. You just want to honor him. You want to say thank you through obedience. So Jesus implicitly at least, is testing her. "Go tell, Mary. Go tell." And Mary goes tells. There's no hesitation. She doesn't say, "Well, just let me hold your feet for one minute, Lord, Rabboni." No, no, he's Rabboni, he's Counselor, and she's the counselee. She's going to listen to him. She trusts his advice. He says, "Go tell. Be going, Mary." She gets going.

So he doesn't only reveal herself to her heart as a counselor and conquer her heart as a counselor, and give her a lesson for her heart as a counselor, but he also gives a

commission to her heart as a counselor. And she goes. She goes. You know, Paul said a woman was the first in transgression, a first to have Christ's resurrection revealed, but a woman is also the first to proclaim his resurrection that had become visible for her. Isn't it interesting that God uses a woman in all these instances? Women have so many valuable ministries they can fulfill in the church today and outside of the church. In all the women issues of our day, we should be focusing on that, not focusing on the one area that is roped off, office-bearing according to Pauline declaration from God. Women, too, are to use their gifts to go tell.

And this is remarkable commission not only to announce the resurrection but actually Mary is to go a step further and she's to announce the coming ascension. Did you catch that? "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. I ascend. I'm alive now but I want to tell you and I want the brethren to know I won't be around physically very much longer. I'm on my way to ascend to my Father and to your Father."

That's a remarkable commission and Jesus uses the ongoing sense here too. Literally in Greek if you translated it literally, "Go tell my brethren I am ascending. It's as if I'm almost leaving the ground now. I'm on my way. I'm on my way to my Father, to your Father, to represent you, to intercede for you, to make a place for you. Tell them to get ready. Tell my brethren to get ready for my parting instructions to them." It's as if Jesus says, "Tell them I'm no more the man of sorrows but the King of glory. Tell them we have one Father and one Spirit and that my Father and my Spirit is your Father and your Spirit. Tell them that I am going on my way to be interceding for them that they may be kept through my name. Tell them that I am their older brother, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, born for adversity but now able to meet all their needs and wants as the exalted Lord of glory. Tell them that I am the conqueror over death, that I lead captivity captive, and that they shall be conquerors through me. Tell them I ascend to my Father and their Father, but this relationship is so permanent, so comforting that I'm not ashamed to call them brethren."

The first time ever Jesus calls the disciples brothers and Mary has the privilege of telling them that. Brethren is the tenderest of all titles. First he called them servants, later he called them disciples, still later he called them friends, but now he calls them brethren. Well, if he calls us brethren, if we're in Christ, as Martin Luther said, we have nothing to fear. If Christ is our brother, said Luther, I would like to know what do we still lack? If he's our older brother and he will care for us like an older brother cares for younger siblings when they're in need, what could we possibly miss in him?

What an encouragement, "Go tell my brethren." What a message, "I ascend to my Father and to your Father." So Mary runs. She runs. Her self-denial is tried by Christ's, "Touch not." Her obedience is tested by Christ's, "Go tell." But by grace she easily passes both tests. She goes right away. Her tears are dried up. Her fears are gone. Her grief is departed. She's radiant with joy. One old divine put it this way, radiant with superlative joy she sails like a vessel laden with precious fruit into the place where the disciples are gathered, and she bursts into the mournful room with boldness, "I have seen the Lord!"

He's not dead! He's alive! He's Rabboni, the Counselor, the Messiah, the Savior!" She proclaims the resurrection. She proclaims the ascension with liberty. Yes, she was not an ordained preacher but I think the message she had for the disciples was like a little mini three-pointer, the reality of the resurrection, the assurance of brotherhood and fatherhood, and the promise of ascension. What a message Mary had to give.

"It's real. He's alive. He told me you are his brothers and God is your Father, and he said he's going to ascend to heaven to represent you." Verse 18 puts it this way, "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her." What a comfort the resurrection is. Yes, the resurrection is no appendix to our Christian faith. It is the faith. It is the gospel itself. It's everything. If Jesus did not arise, Christianity would have died out within one generation. It would have just been another impostor who came along, pretended he was the Messiah and was buried. But you see, that's Paul's whole point in 1 Corinthians 15. In 58 verses he's saying to us, "This is what makes Christianity Christianity, that he is risen from the dead and therefore, brethren, go out and work abundantly knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Go tell. Go live for this Messiah, this Counselor. Ask his counsel in every situation. He will guide you. He will wean you from his fleshly presence. He'll teach you to walk by faith. He'll ripen you for glory. He'll minister to you by his word and Spirit from the right hand of the Father by his servants, by his Bible, by all the spiritual disciplines, and he'll bring you to himself where he is to forever enjoy him."

This is the gospel. Oh, my friend, if you don't know this Savior, you're missing the greatest news this world has, the only worthy news for your life and your eternity. Come and bow, come and bend the knee before the King of kings. Ask him, "Make me thy disciple. Make me like Mary. Help me to die to everything of myself and be my gardener to plant in me a seed of grace, a seed of regeneration, and work the garden of my heart so I may bear fruit. And then be my Counselor all the way to the end, be my Lord, my Savior, and help me to obey thee in all that thou sayest to me. May I, too, be going and telling the good news of a glorious Savior for a rebel sinner. And may I say this to all I meet, 'If he can save me, he can save anyone.'" Amen.

*Gracious God, bless the message tonight and be our Counselor, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Lord, our Rabboni, for this life and a better one to come. In Jesus' name. Amen.*