

Who Are You Looking For?

I hope you slept well last night. Maybe the golden head of the full moon was peeking through your window. It wasn't as dark as it might have been. Maybe you tossed and turned. Or maybe you slept like a baby.

I invite you now to turn your thoughts to someone who had a restless night.

Since Friday afternoon, each hour that's passed has crept by ever so slowly. The first night. The second day. But this second night has been the longest time of all. She has slept very little. Awake or dreaming, images of all that she's seen fill her mind. Sorrow fills her heart. In the darkest hours of a night that seems to have no end, she rises. And Mary Magdalene comes to the garden. Alone.

In the place where he was crucified, there's a garden. His tomb is in the garden. Mary's prepared fragrant spices and scented ointments. And now that the sabbath is over, she can come to tenderly anoint his body. In doing this one last thing for Jesus, she might find a few moments of peace. But how will she

get into the tomb? After he was laid there, she saw a great stone placed across the opening.

And on this first day of the week, it's still so dark. In the shadows, Mary can just barely discern the outline of that ponderous stone. Are her eyes playing tricks on her? The stone's been rolled away from the opening of the tomb! His body is gone. Mary runs, runs like the wind to tell Peter and the beloved disciple. And then follows them back to the place.

Where she stands outside the tomb. Exhausted. Spent. Without hope. Her hope died on Friday. With the other women, she stood near his cross. And even there, she stayed strong. She stayed strong for Jesus. She watched him die.

Now even his body has been taken away from her. And along with it, the last of her strength. Mary weeps. She never knew anything could hurt this much. Not even the pain that was hers before Jesus cast out her demons hurt this much. Tears come. More tears than she thought she had left.

And then she turns. Her breath catches. Someone's there. A man! It must be the gardener. That's not an unreasonable assumption—right? This is, after all, a garden. Now the One

standing beside her in the darkness asks Mary: *Who are you looking for?*

Who are you looking for? She doesn't recognize him. Until he says, *Mary*, and the first light of dawn falls across his face. With joy she can't contain, Mary sees that the One who questions her is Jesus himself.

Who are you looking for? According to this Fourth Gospel, Jesus asks that same question at the very beginning of his ministry. He asks it again, of Mary, here in the early morning. And still today, he asks that question. Asks you and me: Who are you looking for? It's a question I invite you to reflect on with me.

Have you been looking for a long time? Did you begin looking when you were very young? Or did you start later?

Was it after the boss said: *Our first-quarter sales are down, and this company's going to have to make some changes?*

Was it after your beloved said: *It's not you, it's me—but this just isn't working out?*

Was it after the doctor said: *These test results are not what we were hoping for?*

Was it after the phone rang in the middle of the night, and the caller said: *I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but there's been an accident...?*

Who were you looking for when you were in so much pain that you could hardly move?

Who were you looking for when you were so blinded by tears that you could barely see the path in front of you? When—like Mary—you've wept so much that it feels as though no more tears are in you; when each day is a struggle with grief and loss; when all you can do is ask *why*; when you wonder how you're going to keep putting one foot in front of the other, it's easy to miss the presence of the One you've been looking for.

Has there ever been so much darkness in the places you've been looking that you stumbled and almost fell? So much darkness that even if you came upon the One you were looking for, you wouldn't have realized it?

In darkness, it's easy to become disoriented. Could it be that you—like Mary—need to turn around? If you're heading in a different direction, if your life is taking another course, you may not encounter the One you're looking for.

Who *are* you looking for? Could it be a purely historical figure? An ancient teacher of ethics? Have you been looking for someone who's confined to the dusty pages of a rarely-opened book?

Have you been looking for someone bound by time and space? You and I are citizens of a rational age. And we tend to be limited by its logic. Lacking empirical evidence, scientific proof, twenty-first century people may raise a skeptical eyebrow at the miraculous.

And surely, Easter's miracle of miracles falls into this category. At the time of its happening, the gospels fall silent. Human eyes can't see. Human ears can't hear. There's no logical explanation.

So could it be that—like Mary—you've been looking for someone who lies in a cemetery? Are you looking for someone who died and was buried two thousand years ago?

Or are you looking for One who's alive? Who's in the world today? Who are you looking for this Sunday?

Are you looking for One who may not look the way you expect him to look? Could this One resemble a starving child? A

homeless woman? A person grappling with addiction? A cancer patient? A prisoner?

Are you looking for One who stands beside you in the darkness? Who stands beside you in places of despair and hopelessness? Who has a way of appearing unexpectedly, when your need is greatest?

Are you looking for the One who calls your name? The One who *knows* your name? The One who has *always* known your name?

Are you looking for the One who knows you fully? The One who knows everything about you? The One who's known you since before you were born? The One who created you?

Are you looking for the One who never promises you that it will be easy? Who never promises you wealth, health, and happiness? Who never promises you that trouble won't come? But who *has* promised, even in trouble and adversity and heartache, to be with you always? Who comes to you in a garden? Who wants you to know that near *every* Calvary there is a garden?

Are you looking for the One who is all compassion, the One whose voice of comfort resonates through your pain,

saying: *I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one—no one—will take your joy from you?*

Are you looking for the One who wipes away all your tears? The One who turns your weeping into joy and your mourning into dancing?

Are you looking for the One who gives you the assurance that you are defined not by what's happened in your past, but by your life in him: by new life that begins today and has no end?

Beloved, this is the One Mary Magdalene encountered on that long-ago first day of the week. And as it was for her, so it is for you. You don't find this One. This One whose name is Jesus finds *you*.

The risen Lord meets you where you are. In the beautiful light of this Easter day, he greets you. He offers you the precious gift of himself. Pours out on you his unfailing grace. And fills you with all of the blessed hope that is in him.

And when you have received these gifts, he asks you to go and tell. To be resurrection witnesses! To share the great glad tidings that you have met this One who is ascending to his God and your God!

For Jesus Christ is the One you've been looking for all your life. This is the One whose presence with you is real. This is the One who is calling your name today. This is the One who loves you more than you will ever know. This is the Savior in whom everlasting life is yours!

Because of the good news of Easter. The most stupendous news! The very best news you'll ever hear. By the power of almighty God, Christ Jesus has been raised from the dead! The grave could not hold him! Death has lost its sting. Let all the morning stars sing together, and all the children of God shout for joy—for death is swallowed up in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

He is risen. He is risen indeed! He lives. And he shall reign forever and ever!

Alleluia! Glory to God in the highest!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.