

Prayer Corner 4

Mary Magdalene and her friend Joanna talk about Jesus

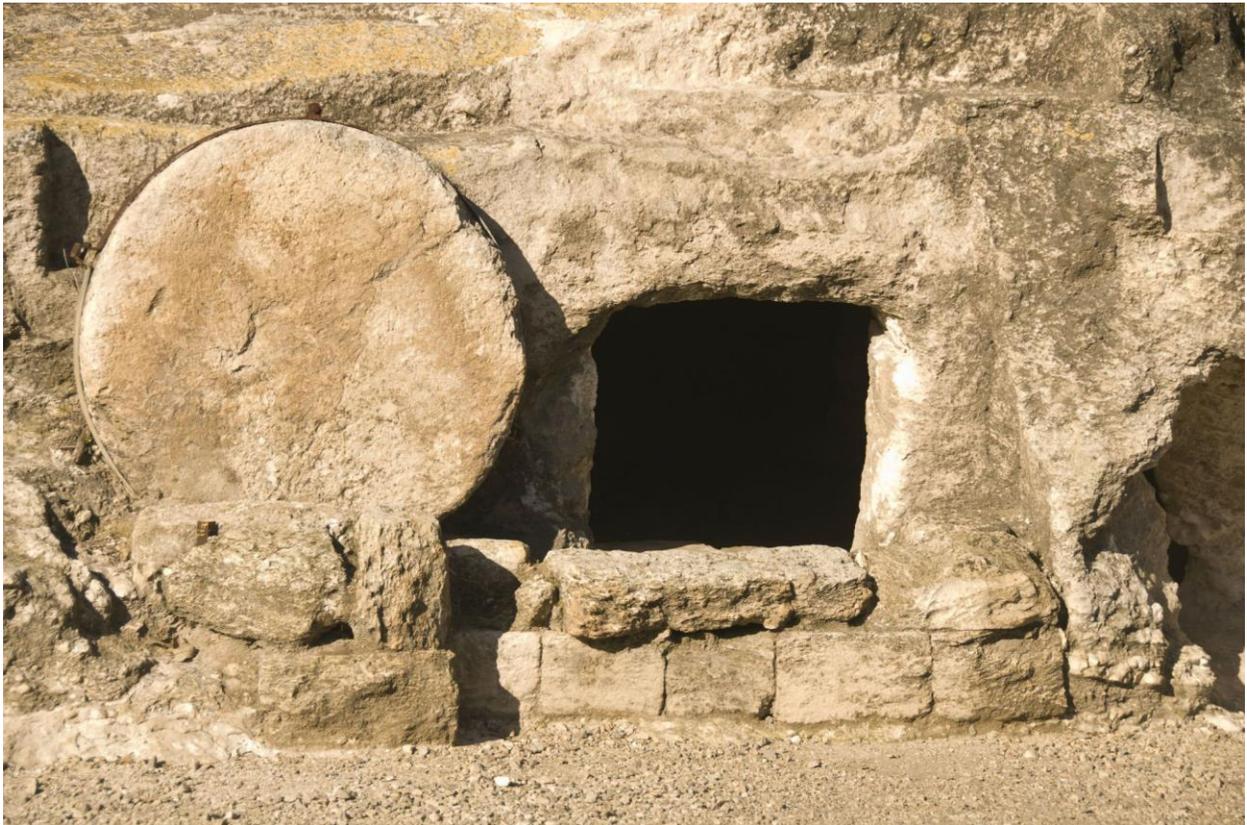
By Angie Rebert

I share with you this week my contemplative prayer practice, which I have turned into a narrative story. It brings to life, what I imagine Mary Magdalene experienced, based on the NKJV of John 20: 1-18. I read the scripture out loud several times, meditating on how Mary would think and feel about the death of Jesus, finding the tomb empty, and then her joy at meeting Jesus.

Before you read my contemplative thoughts, I invite you to read the scripture mentioned above several times out loud slowly and prayerfully, and imagine what it would be like for you, if you were Mary Magdalene.

What is God Holy Spirit saying to you as you read and ponder the Living Word? Pray and Ponder... May you be blessed as you Proceed.

Mary and her friend Joanna are talking about Jesus after the crucifixion.



Mary is sitting quietly, with her friend Joanna, high up on a hillside, overlooking a valley, watching the sunrise splash glorious morning hues across the horizon. Joanna

breaks the silence; "Oh Mary, tell me what happened yesterday at the tomb. I got there too late and Jesus had already gone. Tell me everything! Everything! Every word!"

Mary sighed and slowly stood up, looking out over the misty sunrise-shaded valley and began to speak, very slowly and thoughtfully at first; then her words came tumbling out, as vivid memories crashed through her mind.

"Oh Joanna, I'm still such a mix of grief and joy, mourning and relief! I couldn't sleep at all that first night. I watched them take Jesus down from the Cross. I followed them and watched them lay Him in the tomb. I was horrified to see two Roman guards roll a huge stone across the tomb opening! I wondered how I was going to get into the tomb later, as I planned to bring my spices and fold them into the burial linens. I assumed there was no time for that as there was such a rush to place him in the tomb before sunset. Yes, I was already planning to return and do that! It was the least I could do. It was the ONLY thing I could do!"

"That first evening," Mary reflected. "I just sat in my courtyard garden, wrapping my heavy shawl tightly around me, shivering and weeping. My head and my heart and my body turned cold... went numb. I just sat there and wept and wept. I couldn't stop! I have never wept like that before, even when I was possessed by the demons... first, just normal weeping, but then terrible sobbing, and then retching... like I was vomiting up His horrific suffering. And then, worst of all, Joanna, my heart began to thaw and I began to feel the pain of remembering. And it hurt so much! I wept for hours! I could not stop!"

Mary began to pace along the edge of the hillside cliff's edge, back and forth, back and forth, short steps, punctuated by her rushing thoughts. Joanna sat quietly, not interrupting Mary's trail of anguished memories. Mary paused a few moments, seeming to become a bit calmer, then began speaking again.

"The Sabbath day was so hard and so long! We had to stay at home of course, and there was so much time to think... to remember how He looked, how He talked to us, how He LOVED us. All that time to remember His miracles, His healings, the unbelievable things He did, like walking on water, and making wine from water... and Lazarus dead for four days and then ALIVE again. walking out of the tomb! All because of Jesus! ... All because of Jesus!... So much time... too much time! Too much time for thinking, too much time for pondering, too much time for questioning.... too much time for doubting God... for much time for doubting Jesus.... too much time for DESPAIR! Too much time.... too much time!

And again, Sabbath night, I couldn't sleep... toss and turn, get up and pace, The night was endless. Finally, when I did fall asleep, the horrific nightmares tortured me, and I awoke trembling in fear. My relief at being awake did not last. Reality set in. Jesus is dead!... gone from us! Was it ever even REAL? Were we crazy insane to follow Him... to believe in Him... to LOVE Him?



Mary meets Jesus

Finally, it was almost dawn. I could wait no longer. Dressing quickly, I grabbed my parcel of precious spices, wrapped my cloak tightly around me, and set off for the tomb, walking at a fast pace, even running a bit at times. Then I remembered the huge stone blocking the entrance.

But when I arrived the stone had been rolled away, and I didn't see the guards. My heart was beating so fast, thumping in my chest. I didn't stop to think. I rushed right up to the tomb, bent down and looked in."

"Oh Joanna. It is still like a dream!" Mary turned to face her friend directly. "Two angels were sitting there in white garments, glowing and shimmering. I was weeping again and one angel asked, 'Why are you weeping?'"

"I could barely talk; I was so scared. 'Because they have taken away my Lord,' I replied. 'I do not know where they have laid him.'"

Mary, stopped recounting her story as tears rolled down her cheeks. Joanna waited quietly. She knew her friend Mary, very well. Joanna knew Mary had always been very emotional, a woman of many moods, quick to change from instant anger to absolute quiet, from bubbling joy to overwhelming sadness. But Mary of Magdala was a strong woman, a courageous woman of great loyalty. When she committed to someone or something, Mary held on and never let go!

Joanna remembered that when Jesus healed Mary of her many demons, she was instantly changed and became a devoted disciple. Yes, she was as much a disciple as the twelve. She followed him everywhere he traveled. She left her life of ease as a wealthy

woman and devoted herself to serving Jesus. Joanna continued with her thoughts of admiration for her friend Mary. She remembered how Mary not only generously provided funds to purchase food for Jesus, but also for His disciples. And when they travelled between villages, she would even help prepare the food and serve it herself. Mary always managed to sit near-by when Jesus was teaching his disciples, leaning in to hear His every word, while gazing intently at His face. Joanna heard a little sigh and looked over at her friend. Mary seemed to be lost in her thoughts...and so sad yet peaceful.

Finally, Joanna gently whispered: "Mary, what happened after you talked with the angels?"

"Oh, yes, sorry, Joanna. It all happened so quickly; even now, it seems so unreal!"

"I turned around from the tomb and peered out into the foggy morning mist, and I saw a man standing near-by. I thought he was the gardener. I was again weeping, and this man asked me, 'Why are you weeping?'"

"Because, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

"Then he came closer to me and said, 'Mary.'"

"And I knew!... I knew!... I knew it was Jesus! My Beloved Jesus! I could barely say the word: *Teacher!*"

I rushed towards Him. I had to touch Him... feel Him! I wanted to embrace Him. I wanted to hug him. Yes, Joanna, I know that is not proper, actually forbidden, definitely frowned upon! But I didn't think... I rushed to Him. I barely touched him in a fleeting embrace, when Jesus stopped me."

"Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to My Father. Go and tell my disciples I am ascending to My Father and to your Father, to My God and your God," Jesus told me.

"And I quickly released Him and stepped back. But I felt Him, Joanna! I felt His body! He was real! Not a dream... not a vision, He was real! He IS real! I saw Him! I talked with Him! He's alive!... not dead! Jesus is ALIVE! Jesus is Risen from the dead! Jesus is still with us!"

Mary raised her arms and exclaimed in a voice filled with her strong belief in the risen Jesus, "You may not see Him here as we talk, Joanna, but Jesus is here! I feel His Presence! I know! I know! I know Jesus is HERE! Jesus is Alive! We must go and tell everyone we know: Jesus is Alive! He is risen!"

"Yes, Mary," Joanna acknowledged, "We must go and tell all who knew Him. Jesus is not dead. He is risen!"

“Thank you, God!” Thank you, Jesus!” Mary responded in a joyful voice. And the two women jumped up and hurried down the hillside path to spread the Good News!

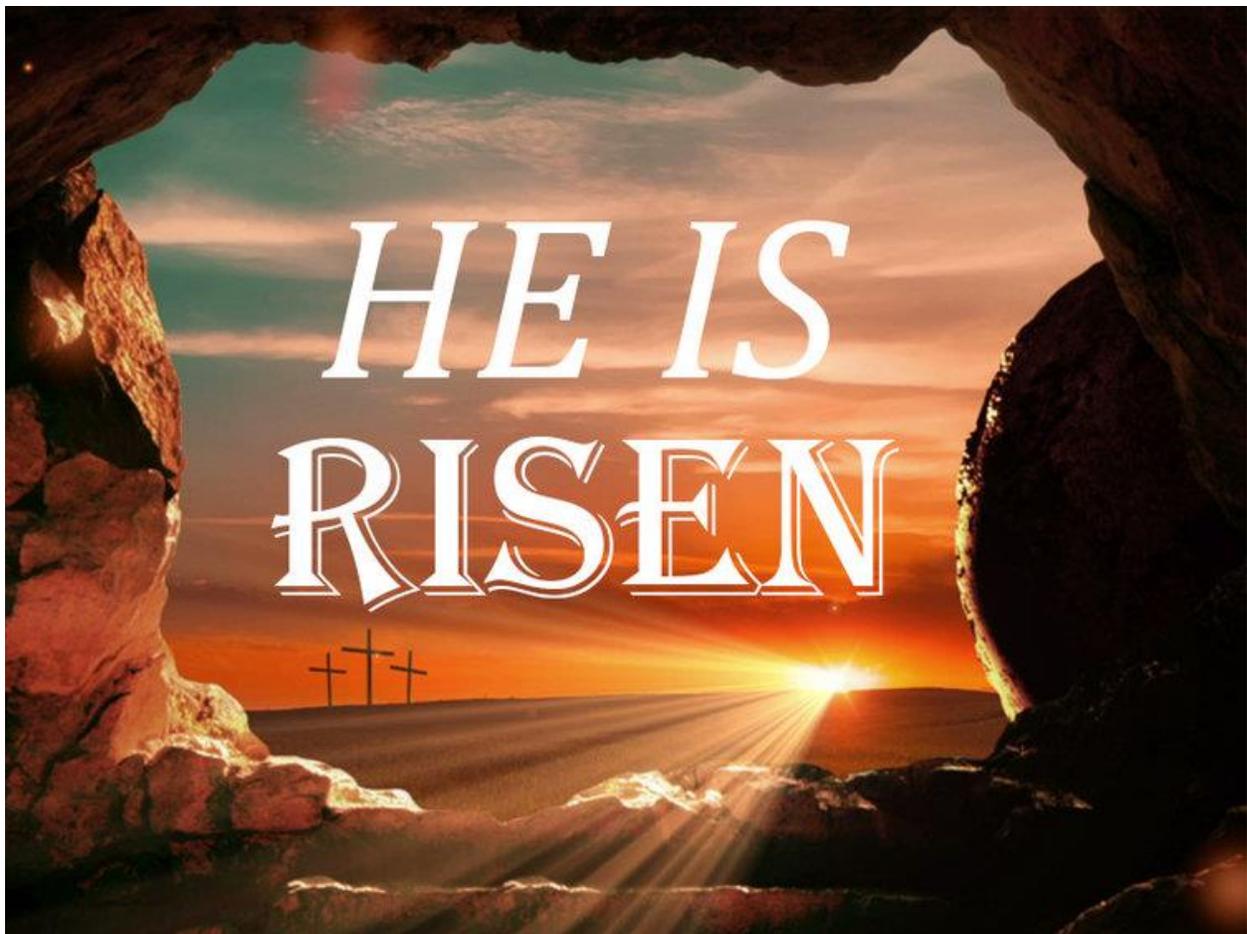
I believe, dear friends, that these last words written above, is the message Holy Spirit is giving us today.

*Jesus is HERE with us, at this very moment,
Teaching, forgiving, empowering and loving us.*

Let us go and share the Good News!

Thank you, God! Thank you, Jesus!

Amen



Picture sources:

Empty tomb – Lokibaho/Getty Images

Mary meets Jesus – cnn.com

Christ is risen – First Baptist Church, Madisonville, KY