

It took everything in me to rustle myself out of bed that first morning after the Sabbath. After the last three days, I simply had nothing left to give.

It had all started with that final supper with Jesus when he washed our feet. Had I known it was going to be his last meal, I might have savored the conversation a bit more, the bread, the wine, the way Jesus tended to my tired feet. I had never experienced such a depth of tenderness and love and presence. Even as I basked in the mystery of it all, something told me things were about to change. And change they did. That Friday, my dearest friend Mary, James and Salome's mother, and I sat helplessly by as Jesus endured lie after lie about him—first in the courtroom and then as people heckled and whipped and eventually lynched him to a tree for all to see.

That his closest friends walked away at his hour of need only made the heartbreak worse. Peter, Judas...I know how easy it is to give into the pressure and expectation of others, but I never expected them to do what they did.

After Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus's body in the tomb, he told Mary and I to go home. There was nothing left to be done, he. But we didn't want to go home. We were desperate to wrap our heads around what we had just seen. Desperate to make sense of all of Jesus' promises, promise that now seemed empty. Desperate to find a reason to go on.

Grief will do that to you, you know. It'll press down on your chest with such decisive force that it can ache just to breathe. So, yeah, you could say that by the time Sunday morning rolled around, the last thing I wanted to do was to get out of bed and face the dawn of a new day. But I did it. I did it because tradition bade me to go to the tomb and anoint Jesus' body. That's what you do when someone dies—you tend to their body to keep the stench away. You honor them by caring for them. And I guess there was a part of me that had hoped that by fulfilling my duty I might be able to come to terms with the finality of death.

So, with my eyes still puffy and red from all the crying I had been doing over the last several days I splashed water on my face, threw on the tunic that I had worn the day before, and headed out the door to meet Mary. As much as I don't like to admit it, seeing Mary looking as haggard as I did, was actually a welcome relief. There's something comforting about knowing you're not the only one

making your way through the valley of the shadow of death. So we walked. Shedding tears. Saying nothing. Holding one another up by our presence.

As we inched closer to the tomb it dawned on us that we had no idea how we were going to roll the stone back from the tomb. Mary suggested that maybe someone would be there to help us. But I wasn't so sure.

You see, after the chaos and frenzy of Friday, everyone was so afraid to be connected with Jesus. To be associated with Jesus was to be associated with failure and stupidity. Insurrection and defiance.

That's one of the reasons why Mary and I headed out so early in the morning. As much as we wanted to fulfill our duty we also didn't want to stir up any more trouble. Never in my wildest dreams though did I imagine that no matter how hard we'd try to avoid trouble, trouble would find us—good trouble that is?

But good trouble is what happened when we arrived. Instead of worrying about what we'd find outside the tomb, we should have been concerned about what we'd find inside, or rather, what we did not find. Where Jesus's body should have been, there was someone neither one of us had ever seen before, someone whose words undid everything I had known to be true about myself and the world:

“You are looking for Jesus. He is not here. Go tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

If you're anything like me you might have simply glossed over those words about Peter and Galilee as mere background information and focused on the fact that a man had risen from the dead. And yes, I was dumbfounded by the notion of a risen Jesus. But what got me were those words: Peter. Galilee. Not only had Jesus emerged from the vice gripe of hell, he was wasting no time on making sure to all of us, included Peter—the one with all the bravado and certainty, the one who denied Jesus, the one who became such a disappointment—had not been written off or forgotten. And *that* is what undid me: God's unrelenting triumph over darkness and failure and selfishness and fear and death and everything that tries to define and destroy us—happened irrespective of what we had, of our faithlessness, or our preparation.

Despite not fully understanding the implications of Jesus' resurrection,
despite not planning for it,
despite not having precedent for it,
despite the laws of nature,

the end of the world as I knew it was had become the beginning of a life had never conceived possible—a new beginning for me, for Peter, for Judas, for all of us.

The same is true for you.

Despite the stress of the pandemic,
despite the tears you've shed, the job you may have lost, the relationship that may be barely hanging on,
despite doubting and not trusting in God's love and faithfulness,
despite the laws of nature,
Despite everything, Jesus has risen from the dead, and you have been given—are given, every single day—a new beginning to live this thing called life and to let yourself love and be loved with such fierce, matchless devotion and grace.

And if you're like me, it may be hard to process it all. That's okay. As you just heard Mark say, I was terrified. And I was. It's not that I didn't want Jesus to be alive, I just wanted to make sense of it. I wanted to not feel so dependent on such grace and mercy. Perhaps you know what's that like? You Americans have a things for rugged individualism and being in control.

Here's the thing: after Mary and I fled the tomb and got closer to home, we began to consider that maybe God wasn't calling us to have answers but to be in awe and wonder at a Love that will not forsake or let us go even when all is lost. Clearly, the resurrection had happened regardless of whether I was ready to celebrate it or not, which meant that the promise was mine also mine whether I was ready to lean into it or not. And to be sure, I wasn't ready to do that. I wasn't ready to make Jesus' way of love and mercy and justice my heart's cry. Not right then. I had been burned once. I didn't want to be burned again. But that's when it dawned on me—even if I got burned or lost or betrayed over and over, it wouldn't matter, for not even the worst of humanity could not stop Love with a capital L. And so despite my questions and my fear I made way to Galilee. I took a risk and got into some good trouble because Love in the form of Jesus Christ had taken a risk on me—and won.

Although I write from a different millennium, I want you to know that today is not just about what happened to Jesus all those years ago. Nor is this day you call Easter a metaphor for spring. It's about God's resurrecting power at work in us despite our understanding or attempts to manufacture a "perfect" day or how we feel or don't feel, believe or do not believe. The promise is made real to all of us—whether or not you feel like celebrating or not. And if you don't that is okay. The darkness is not bad, it's a void where new life can be born.

I won't lie to you though—life did go on to burn me a few more times...
but it did not destroy me.

Only by giving my fragile, tender soul to God—tear by tear, laugh by laugh, moment by moment—did I discover that neither despair nor death nor tradition nor reason can undermine God's resurrecting power in our lives. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever. We are all walking toward a shore we can't see—a shore dawning in every waking.

Will you let yourself bask in the awe and wonder of it all?
Will you release the desire to be one step ahead of God and take a risk on matchless Love?
Will you walk toward your own Galilean shore?

Christ is risen my friends.
No matter what life throws you, you will, too.
Again and again and again.

Love always,
Mary Magdalene

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