

There are moments in all of our lives that are frozen in time and frozen in our memories. They can be good moments, and bad moments. Moments of overwhelming joy, and moments of profound grief. These frozen moments are locked in our hearts and our minds because of the impact they've made, and that impact holds a kind of power in our lives. It takes just a moment or two to flip of a switch in your brain, and suddenly, you can find yourself reliving one of those moments. Can you remember, and relive it? Let's find out. Do you remember your first kiss? How about a wedding you went to? Maybe your own wedding? Do you remember that look on the doctor's face, that one time? How about the day a child was born? Or that time when that one really bad storm came sweeping over the plains? How about that time when you had to pack up all your stuff and move? Or that time when you lost a person you loved?

All of these are moments which are locked in place, and in some sense, time stops when these frozen moments are called to mind. The most dramatic of them all, are those moments of life and death that make up the greatest, most wonderful events, and the worst, most devastating events of our living. "Defining moments" some folks might call them. As we gather here at Immanuel on this Easter Sunday, we celebrate the single most important defining moment of our Christian faith - the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without this moment, none of the other defining moments of our lives would ever make sense.

The moment of Christ's resurrection was one of the frozen moments in the lives of Mary Magdalene and the woman that Matthew's gospel calls, "the other Mary."

On that Sunday, many years ago, Mary Magdalene woke up for the second time, since that horrible Friday, to the chilling reality of a world without Jesus, the One who had completely changed her life. That moment on Friday, as Matthew's gospel tells us, when Jesus hung on the cross and called out to a dark sky, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!"*... that moment was forever etched in her mind. He had been so full of life, energy and stunning healing power - she herself had experienced all of that the day Jesus had set her free from years of emotional anguish and turmoil - and now suddenly her whole new world and new life was gone.

He had given her a new life and promised those who followed him a new life, but now that terrible image of his lifeless body on a Roman cross is frozen in her mind. Friday night, Sabbath and the evening before the first day of the week dragged on moment by moment, and the grief lingered without relief.

Much of that time was spent at Jesus' graveside. Just a few verses before our gospel reading begins, Matthew writes, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb." We might call it a wake, or a visitation, but with nothing else to do and the light of their lives extinguished, they sat across from the tomb, watching the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea carefully lay Jesus' body in the rock-hewn tomb.

A numb fog-like spirit surrounded these women who were always in the background of Jesus' public life. This was the only way they knew to stay close to him. Drawn by love, they sat there in that strange silent period that comes to all of us when someone we love so very much is taken from us. We wait, not sure why, but we wait -- unable to go back to what was, and not sure how to move forward into what will be.

Frozen moments. We seen them over and over, just like everyone else throughout history. A crowd gathers on a sidewalk outside of a New York apartment in the days following the murder of John Lennon on December 8, 1980. For countless hours, crowds stood holding candles, weeping and standing in that emotional fog we know so well.

Similar crowds stood all over America in the days following President John F. Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963.

Crowds still gather in that foggy state on the sidewalks of New York City, looking toward that place where the twin towers of the World Trade Center once stood. The sense of shock and disbelief that filled the hearts and minds of millions all over the world as the Twin Towers came crashing to the ground on September 11, 2001, may qualify as the single most frozen moment in our contemporary world.

Perhaps this comes closest to what Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were feeling as they sat "across from the tomb."

Then there is another moment that changed Mary's Magdalene's life and the lives of countless millions since the day it happened. The scene is riveting! We heard Matthew's description of it minutes ago. John C. Purdy recaptures the scene in his book of reflections, *God With a Human Face*. [Westminster/John Knox, 1993] Purdy writes: *Cecil B. DeMille couldn't have dreamed up anything more stunning. (It was literally stunning for the men who were guarding the tomb.) There was an earthquake, caused by something like a sonic boom. An angel in shining raiment came plunging down out of the sky like a stealth fighter; he rolled back the tombstone and sat on it. The men who were guarding the tomb were scared to death - or at least so frightened that they*

passed out and lay like dead men. So dazzling was the heavenly messenger that it was reported - presumably by the women - that he flashed like lightning. One can only guess at the timbre and resonance of his voice. Charlton Heston and James Earl Jones, eat your hearts out! That's what Mr. Purdy writes.

Mary Magdalene and the "other" Mary came back to revisit their grief early on that first Easter Morning, having perhaps slept a few moments here and there between those crashing waves of shock and unbelief. And then, another frozen moment happens, a defining moment when joy cuts through their rock hard grief like a red-hot poker through a block of ice! The words are of the variety that stop you dead in your tracks, and bring your hectic life agenda to a screeching halt. Words like: *"You're hired!" "Yes, I'll marry you!" "Mom, Dad, I'm pregnant!" "You're biopsy came back negative!"*

These words that the angel says on this day are forever engraved on the hearts and soul of every person who has ever embraced the name of Jesus Christ since they were first spoken. These words are, ***"He is not here, for He has been raised..."***

This changes everything!

From the hopeless fog that descended upon the earliest followers of Jesus Christ, to the stunned victims of the world's worst tragedies - these words change everything. "He is not here, for he has been raised!"

No matter how long the road or dark the way, the Easter faith proclaims hope in the face of despair, light in the midst of darkness, joy in the night of sorrow and most of all... life in a glorious victory over death! It is difficult to wrap our minds around the impact these words must have had on the two Mary's. Into the early dawn, when light was just beginning to disperse the shadows around the tomb, it is as though an explosion went off in front of them!

"Do not be afraid," an angel's voice cries out.

Yeah, right! I get startled when I'm concentrating on something in the quiet, and someone sneaks up on me and says something like, "Hey, what are you doing?" It happened to me twice yesterday. My heart skipped a bit, and maybe the same thing happens to you, too.

But a brilliant angel from heaven bursting into a grief laden, sleepy early morning visit to a graveside - now that's a frightening experience. Then the emotional roller coaster continues to jar them as the words are then spoken, *"He is not here, for he has been raised!"*

With those words, that first dawning of Easter day brought a hopeful light that dispelled the awful darkness of death for all time and eternity!

But on this Easter Sunday, there are three unlikely words that also seek to grab our attention. On the surface, they pale in comparison to the amazing words which announced Jesus' resurrection. The angel's words certainly are the core of our gospel story this morning, and the core of our faith. But there are some other words that bring hope to you and to me and to every person who has ever felt very small in a universe of famous and important people.

Let these three words sink in for a moment: "The *other* Mary!"

Easter is filled with all kinds of glorious phrases and songs and prayers. We sing, "*Jesus Christ is Risen Today! Alleluia!*" Millions of Christians will join in the Easter Acclamation. "*Alleluia! The Lord is Risen!*" and the response comes back, "*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*" And Matthew's gospel proclaims, "*He is not here, for he has been raised!*"

But these three other words are the words that speak with a special meaning today. "*The other Mary...*" Do you remember hearing them in the gospel reading today? Let's hear these words once again in their context, "*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.*"

At the tomb was, of course, Mary Magdalene, we all know. But who else came to the tomb to hear the earth-shaking, life-changing words of the angel? Was it Peter, Chief of the Apostles? Was it the Roman Emperor, or at least a Centurion? How about the Wise Men from the East? Maybe they would be the proper audience for the first announcement of God's stunning victory over death.

But it wasn't any of them, was it? No... it wasn't the rich or the powerful or the famous who were chosen to hear the words. It was two women who had faithfully followed and ministered to Jesus. It was Mary Magdalene, and most amazing of all -- "*the other Mary.*"

Have you ever been the other Mary? There is the second century Christian apologist Justin Martyr and pop singer Justin Timberlake and Gumbo-cooking expert Justin Wilson. All of those Justin's are pretty famous. And then there's me, "the other Justin." The absolute majority of us will never even make a footnote

in history. Have you ever felt like the "other" Mary or the "other" Justin, or Elizabeth, or William?

And yet, there we are, the others, right at the center of the most incredible moment of all time!

There we are when God shows up and turns the world inside out and upside down in a way that changes everything for everybody. We others are there, and the angel's message is for us, too. ***"He is not here, for he has been raised..."***

No matter who you are, where you've been, what your station in life is, or how life has been for you, the glorious truth of this Easter celebration of the victory of life over death is for you! It is for "the other Mary," and for you and for me! Thanks be to God! ***"He is not here, for he has been raised..."*** The Lord is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**