

There were only women left late that afternoon. The afternoon that Jesus died. All of the other followers of Jesus were gone. The male followers. They were afraid of the Jewish leaders even though there was no obvious threat against them. We had followed Jesus from Galilee, and were not about to abandon him now.

There were several women there, including Jesus' mother and me. Mary Magdalene. I had followed Jesus faithfully since he had cast seven spirits out of me.

We were exhausted both mentally and physically. We only had a few hours' sleep the previous night, because the men woke us up after Jesus had been taken by the Jewish leaders. We stayed outside while Jesus was tried before the high priest, before the Sanhedrin, and before Pilate and Herod. We tried to quiet the crowds stirred up by the Jewish leaders, but our pleas had no effect. We were a devoted group. But a group of *women*. (her tone will convey)

We watched the bloodied Jesus carry his cross a short way before Simon of Cyrene had to help him. We followed as close as possible while the soldiers led him to Golgotha, laid him on the cross, and beat the nails into his hand and feet. Shudderingly, we clustered together, when the cross dropped into the hole in the ground.

We listened to the two thieves on the other crosses berate Jesus, though one later changed his ways. Earlier, Mary the mother of Jesus, got a new son, when Jesus entrusted her to John. He had come by. Briefly. We heard Jesus say a few things through his clenched teeth and heaving lungs, saw him get speared by the soldier. We watched his dead body get carried off by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. We followed them to the tomb, saw them place the body in the tomb, and waited until the stone was levered into place.¹ It was over.

We should have gone back into town to get ready to celebrate Passover. We women—we had to prepare, but Jewish rituals were abhorrent to us at this moment. Together, we sat in the darkness across from the tomb, and prayed. Unlike the disciples...the men, we were able to stay awake and pray.

Allow me to let you in on a little secret. During that whole ordeal, none of us, including Jesus' mother, wailed or cried like Jewish women typically did at the death of a loved one. We had full confidence that Jesus would make things right, as he had always done. We didn't know how or

¹ Matthew 27:61

when, but we knew he would. It's why we stayed, while the men abandoned Jesus. They did not yet have full faith in Jesus. We....had no other options.

The next day, Saturday, we rested and tried to celebrate the Passover as best we could. Against the rules of the Pharisees, I went around the city and gathered the things that would be needed to prepare the body of Jesus for final burial. It proved difficult because nobody wanted to work or sell things on the Sabbath, but I was very persuasive. I knew that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had done their best, but neither of them had ever prepared a body for burial. That type of work was typically reserved for women.

I heard that soldiers had arrived to further secure the tomb. The Jewish leaders were worried that the disciples would steal the body and claim Jesus was resurrected, so they convinced Pilate to make sure that didn't happen. He instructed them to take a guard, seal the tomb, and post soldiers to make sure nothing happened.

Before dawn, on Sunday, I gathered my things, and headed to the tomb with several other women.² We left quietly so as not to wake the other women. I didn't have a clue how to roll back the stone, but the Holy Spirit urged me to go anyway. We arrived just as light was breaking. I was sure nothing worse could happen than what had already happened. That's when the violent earthquake hit. Mary and I went to our knees.

We saw a streak of light, blinding light, and an angel. An angel appeared before the tomb.³ It was giant, and wore clothes as white as snow. With a flick of its finger, the stone in front of the tomb was rolled back. The guards at the tomb fainted! They were petrified with fear, it was like they were dead!!

The angel said to us, "Do not be afraid." We knew then that this was a true angel, because that's what they often say when meeting humans. "He is not here, he has risen, as he said. Come and see the place where the Lord lay." We stumbled into the tomb and saw the grave clothes laying there ... but no body! The tomb had no body in it!

The angel continued, "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead and is going to Galilee. There you will see him." If you ever talk to an angel, you will obey him immediately, just as we did. Stepping over the soldiers, we rushed to tell the disciples. The angel entrusted women to take the news of Jesus' resurrection! Can you believe it?

The soldiers had recovered sufficiently, while we went to the disciples, they went to the Jewish officials. The Jewish leaders bribed the soldiers to tell everyone that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. Nobody needed an eyewitness like me to tell them the untruth in that

² Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1

³ Matthew 28

statement. The soldiers would have been executed if such a thing had happened, and everyone knew it. Their very lives were a testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

We got to the disciples. They could not believe our news.⁴ Peter ran to the tomb to find out, but he was outrun by the younger John. John arrived, peeked in the cave and saw the grave clothes laying in a heap as if a body just dematerialized through them. Peter came panting up and rushed by John into the tomb. He not only saw the grave clothes on the ground, but saw the headpiece folded up. That is when he believed. No soldier would have taken the time to fold it.

Peter and John returned to the disciples and gave them the incredible news. The body of Jesus was gone!

What happened to me? I went back to the tomb to pray. As I stood outside praying and crying, I bent over to look in the tomb, and saw two angels seated where Jesus' body had been. They asked why I was crying. I was incredulous at their question. "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they put him?"

There was a noise, I turned. It was the gardener. I asked him where he had put the body, if indeed he had moved it. Then, one word changed everything. One word announced a change in the entire course of history. That one word was...my name.

"Mary." It was Jesus! I rushed to hold him. I never wanted for him to leave me again. He told me not to hold on, but to go tell the others, which I did.

Jesus had indeed risen! Jesus was ALIVE!

I went back to tell all the others, including the women, but honestly, I did not really expect any of them to believe me. But...not long after that, Jesus appeared to Peter, and then to the rest of the apostles.⁵ He eventually appeared to over 500 believers.⁶ Like the teacher he always was, Jesus opened their eyes to the meaning of the Scriptures they had read their entire lives. He proved to them he was the Messiah.

Based on what you know about me, you can probably guess what I did next. I went back to Galilee with the rest of the disciples, and got to spend the next several weeks around them and the Lord Jesus.

Maybe you're wondering about something. The same thing I used to wonder about. Why did Jesus pick me, a woman, a woman formerly possessed with seven demons, to be the first person to know about his resurrection? Why me?

⁴ Luke 24:11

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:5

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:6

Consider this instead: Why has he chosen you to know about him? Why do you get to have a Bible and hear the Gospel story? Why do you get to see him through the lives of his followers? Why do you get to know the same thing that I know? He is alive! Jesus... is... alive!