My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our Easter Resurrection, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Easter. Ahhhhhh. Let’s all close our eyes, take a deep breath, all of us to smell and feel the day of Resurrection. C’mon, I’m fresh from a conference where they made us do this as well as sit in dead silence for 10 minutes at a time, so we can all take 10 seconds and breathe in….and then again….ahhhh. It’s good to see all of you. My friend Lamar from the Wilton Church I served before coming here would always come back with “it’s good to be seen”.

But our scriptures give us a different story on Easter morning, don’t they? On the Sunday morning after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb and sees…no one. So goes back to the disciples and there’s this road race back to the tomb where they again see…no one. Now, let’s remember. Even though these are the apostles we’re talking about, these are still guys.

Now, what happens when men try and solve a problem? Hmm? When men get together, and there’s something they can’t quite figure out, they kind of stand around, get a quirky look on their face, cock their head, maybe scratch their beard (beards were quite popular back then), and what would they have said? Probably what men of today say when they gather in confused groups. “Huh. Haven’t seen that one before. Go figure. Don’t know how that happened. Oh well, let’s go home.”

Now, like modern women, Mary Magdalene must be beside herself at this point, because she goes and gets Peter, the Rock of the Church Peter, and the beloved disciple, and this is what they do? Shrug and go home?

It’s no wonder as she watches this she begins not just crying, but WEEPING. Crying is different. Children cry during temper tantrums. When everything goes wrong and we’ve had a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day, *we* cry in frustration. But weeping…that’s a soul thing. Weeping is this profound, whole body and mind sadness that takes us, particularly when we’re grieving. The Bible gets this one right. Mary weeps.

And the other thing we notice here, is that she’s still at the tomb. The guys, they don’t invite her to come with them, maybe they do, but most probably they wander off, and incredulous that no one is helping find the one most important person in her life these last three years, she won’t go, because she can’t. There is no where to go. We can imagine her standing there, but ready to drop to the ground, in deep, heaving sobs, her mind shut down and her heart truly broken. This is what lamentation is. Feel that for a moment. (pause).

We often think of Mary Magdalene as a minor figure in the story of Jesus and the twelve, because she is never counted in that number. But actually, if we look at all of the mentions of the names of the disciples in the gospels, we see that Mary is mentioned 12 times, more than most of the apostles. What else do we know about Mary?

We just don’t talk about Mary Magdalene all that much, do we? But we should. Because in this story, she holds the keys to our understanding of the Easter story, the Easter message, and how it is interpreted and spread in the world.

Mary was a pretty common name, and to make sure we’re not confusing her with Mary mother of Jesus and Mary the mother of the Son of Zebedee James and Mary, the wife of Clopas they identify her through geography rather than male progeny or patriarchy. Unfortunately many people believe her to be a prostitute, but that’s from Andrew Lloyd Weber’s Jesus Christ Superstar and Mel Gibson’s The Last Temptation of Christ. It’s not faithful to the text, and it’s not Mary Magdalene.

Magdala was a fishing city on the western shore of Galilee and she was probably pretty well off we think, because the disciples had to support Jesus and themselves for three years after quitting their jobs, so Mary was pretty generous with them, particularly since Jesus was responsible for driving out her seven demons, what today we would call mental illness.

And so it’s this Mary that looks incredulously as the guys go home, and, only when her mind is turned off and her heart is rendered open, is she able to check her sanity and look inside. And she sees a vision of two angels, and they try and figure out her grieving.

“Why are you weeping?” and she says what has driven her to grief, that she just wants to see the dead Jesus when she turns around and she has another vision and the same question is asked, “why are you weeping?”

This happens to us today. Dreams and visions. Dreams are those things where we experience events, but we wake up and know it’s not real. Visions are things where we see things that we mistake for real. We can have night terrors, swear someone is in the house, and call the cops. We see people, hear voices, feel touch of those who we know are dead or not with us at this time and place but hundreds or thousands of miles away. Oh, c’mon, we’ve all had these “mystical experiences”. We just refuse to talk about them thinking if we mention it we’ll seem foolish or unhinged. But we know, deep down in our hearts, what we heard and saw was true.

And so Mary Magdalene sees the gardener (Jesus really is not just the Good Shepherd, but the gardener too, if we think about it). But it’s when Jesus calls us by name… “Mary!” he says…that we have eyes that can see, and ears that can hear, and we know God is with us in the midst of our confusion, our rent and torn heart, and the depths of our grief. God is most with us when we lose a loved one, because God, too, knows how it feels to have a child killed unjustly.

And Jesus says to her, “Go and tell.” For he is not just going to heaven, but he is returning to whom? “To my God and to your God”. To YOUR God. When YOU are called by name, you recognize God is near and here, right? Jesus tells Mary not to touch him, of course, because what is happening is bigger than just one person. It’s for the world, for all peoples. This is not just the resurrection for Mary, but for everyone. But ***she*** is chosen as the first one to tell others about the Good News. The Good News of the Gospel is not delivered to or by the twelve male disciples that Easter morning. It’s delivered by the 13th disciple—the woman disciple, the open and broken-hearted one. Mary, who faithfully waited and saw and heard on that day that death cannot have the last word.

Mary’s family was important enough that she was able to get an audience with the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar to tell him of Pilate’s killing of an innocent man. It was traditional to give a gift to the emperor when being granted an audience, and she brought with her an egg, and gave it to him with the words, “Christ is risen!” Tiberius responded saying that no man could rise from the dead any easier than a white egg could turn red. And you can guess what happened—the egg turned red, and we Christians have given that traditional Easter Greeting—Christ is Risen—ever since. And we know this truth because the egg didn’t turn green, or beige, or blue. What is red in our tradition? (the Holy Spirit, that’s right). Mary first held the Holy Spirit to Rome, long before Paul and the early Christians arrived on the scene.

So the first sermon to the powers that be at the time was also delivered by Mary, the faithful one, the Holy Spirit filled one. The one overlooked when we talk about the disciples. But like most things in the Bible, the one who is closest to Jesus’ heart is the one at the margins. It gives us hope when we think we’re left behind by life that God might choose us, too, the one at the margins, to receive God’s blessings and announce the Good News.

Let me leave you with this final thought.

What is the Good News? (pause…they will probably say “Christ Is Risen”). OK, I gave that one too you, didn’t I? But what does that mean? This is important. The Easter story didn’t occur so the world can stand up on Easter Sunday and say, “Hooray for Jesus, you didn’t die!” It happened so that JESUS can say, “Hooray for the world, for YOU will not die!”

So friends, brother, sisters, that’s it. Know that death is no longer possible, because life has come into the world forever. It is good not just to see—but to be seen. You can thank Lamar for those words and for this message this Easter.

Thanks be to God, Amen.