

In our world things disappear -

things go missing –

things become empty – vacant - blank - bare!

I don't like it when my things go missing.

I don't like it when things are empty!

In John's gospel, Mary is alone as she goes to the tomb. She goes to pay her respect and finds the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. Mary is upset at finding Jesus' tomb empty. She is confused. Perhaps we can give her some leeway here. She arrives at the tomb in the darkness of the early morning hours. Maybe she doesn't see clearly. We hear Mary's emotional reaction, arriving at the empty tomb, her despair echoes in all succeeding generations.

She grieves, she yearns, she weeps!

We hear the hurt and longing, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

It's one thing to misplace your car keys or eyeglasses. Sometimes we forget where we parked the car. But a missing body? That would be traumatic!

When things go missing in our lives, when things become empty we become distressed. When relationships don't build up but tear down, we are

sad. When material pursuits take time away from family, friends and God, we feel the pain. When our expectations end up unfulfilled and empty, our souls are not fed.

Empty makes me anxious? An *empty* gas tank? An *empty* stomach? I don't like being empty-handed or empty-headed? Sometimes coming home to an *empty* house is difficult. When my heart is *empty*, I am grief stricken.

The dictionary gives us multiple meanings for *empty*: from holding nothing to lacking force or power, lacking purpose or substance; meaninglessness. No one wants to live an *empty, meaningless life*. An *empty* church, a shakened faith community that abandons God is tragic.

In our world, there is a lot of emptiness – many of us try to avoid it. We turn away from emptiness associated with sorrow, anger, and fear. Who can bear the empty feeling in the pit of one's stomach when you hear that a child is missing, a loved has died, or been hurt in an accident.

Trouble in the Text: We know emptiness and we relate to Mary's weeping at the empty tomb. We hear her distress and it seeps into us.

What is it that God is saying to us from an empty tomb – from that void? God is reminding us to believe – to repent – to turn our lives around and be converted into followers of the One who is not in the tomb. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for conversion means “turn back” or “return.”

Conversion calls for both the head and the heart to take part in turning back to God. Sometimes it happens in an instant and for others it happens over time. Mary..., the disciple..., then Peter were converted from uncomprehending to a knowing faith. When our eyes, our hearts, our minds are open to faith, hope and love, we realize that conversion is accomplished, not from our purpose or individual strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit being active in our lives.

In our scripture today, Mary has expectations that Jesus' body will be there, but she sees dimly, in the dark. "Someone has taken him and we don't know where to find him..." Concern, questioning, fear that the one they loved, not only was crucified, but that his body was stolen. "*They*" took him. Mary is not speaking about God here but those others who did something with the body. One more horror to deal with. She's grieving and a part of her grief is confusion. She feels helpless.

Mary runs to tell Peter and the other disciple that Jesus' body is gone. Then, these two disciples ran to the tomb, like competitive young boys running a race. Frantic with fear, they're full of anxiety. What does it all mean? What will it mean for them, for you and me, in the days ahead? The Beloved Disciple hesitates to go in. He's afraid. It's empty, but not completely. He could see linen wrappings but he did not go in.

Peter rushes into the tomb, his excess enthusiasm always showing up in the Gospel stories. He saw the linen wrappings too and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head. The body's gone, but not the clothes. Was the body stolen? The other disciple, the beloved disciple, (John), went in with him and he believed.

John believes without full comprehension. He's one of those optimistic, possibility thinkers who believes eternal life trumps death. He has an unwavering trust in God that things will always work for good, even at a crucifixion.

Jesus' grave clothes show that the body was not stolen. Jesus left death behind. No one has taken Jesus away. He has been raised, but they did not understand. We, too, rush to understand those things in life that are most difficult to comprehend.

Sometimes, the most dramatic moments in our lives take time to sink in!

Mary stood outside the tomb and weeps. She's heartbroken. She feels empty. Her Lord, her security, her inheritance was no-where to be found. And she weeps. No matter how desolate, how empty we may feel, tears come and over time they comfort us.

Mary is weeping for what is gone. She obviously expects nothing to happen; she has come to mourn the loss of life, of a body to touch, and to bid

good-bye. In her grief she can hardly think clearly. She sees two angels and does not recognize their divine origins. She sees Jesus and mistakes him for the gardener. When we are upset, grieving, overwhelmed by circumstances in our lives, we don't see clearly either.

Jesus says to Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? We know it's Jesus but Mary doesn't know yet. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." She's pleading to know where Jesus' body is. But there's a second level of meaning with Jesus' question, "Whom are you looking for?" And that is ...in the beginning of this Gospel, Jesus poses a similar question to two disciples who followed him, "What do you seek?" And Andrew later told his brother Peter, we have found the Messiah!

In our confused state, we are like Mary, not understanding, hurried and rushed. She sees angels but they cannot hold her interest. She turns away from them. She sees Jesus but doesn't recognize him. Until he calls her by name, and now she really *turns back*. Now, she encounters the one whom she sought. Now, her conversion takes place.

Grace in the text: "Mary!" says Jesus. This time when Mary turns to Jesus, she recognizes him and calls him, "Rabbouni!" teacher, rabbi. Jesus appears on Easter morning! Jesus knows his sheep by name. Jesus had

promised transformation from weeping and pain to joy, and Mary experiences that through Jesus' word and his presence.

Mary sees and believes, but Jesus commands her to, "Do not hold on to me." What could have been harder to hear for Mary? Finally, her Lord is there but he says do not hold on to me. "I have not yet ascended to the Father."

Mary had found Jesus but immediately she has to let go, for Jesus still hadn't ascended. He still needed to be lifted up. He needed to be exalted. Jesus' glorification begins when he is lifted up on the cross, but it will not be complete until he returns to God. Because Jesus' glorification consists of his death, his resurrection and his ascension.

Jesus' 2nd command to Mary is go and proclaim the good news of his ascension to the other disciples. "But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my god and your God.'"

Mary obeys the risen Jesus, fighting her impulse to cling to a familiar body, and leaves the garden to tell what she knows to be true. This unexpected ending is now a beginning of telling truth about life to those who want to deal only in death, of offering living water and the bread of life to those who want only to buy and sell commodities that perish.

Mary Magdalene is the first disciple to proclaim the good news of Easter! God sends Mary as the apostle to the disciples.

She is the first witness to the resurrection, announcing both the fact of the resurrection "I have seen the Lord" and the content of Jesus' message "He had said these things to her."

Grace in the world: This is a time to rejoice. Hallelujah, Christ is risen! We believe in a resurrected Christ, one who died for our sins, who paid our debt. Hallelujah! Christ is risen, indeed!