

Mary Magdalene stepped carefully through the darkness. Although she could not see well or far ahead, her eyes were adapted to the dark. It was not as though there were no light at all. There was enough light to guide her to the garden and to the tomb where Jesus' body lay.

Mary and all those who loved Jesus were struggling to make their way through the darkest time they had ever experienced. Those who had managed to stay with Jesus all the way to the cross had witnessed his murder. What a horrible sight! And they had been helpless to do anything except receive a few last words from him.

Those who had not been able to stand by Jesus grieved doubly because now they couldn't talk with him and make things right. There would always be this unfinished business between them, and they regretted it bitterly. Peter, for one, wished he had kept his mouth shut and not made those grand promises to stick by Jesus no matter what.

Now what could they make of the hopes and dreams Jesus gave them? Nothing! Hope was dead. Dreams were dead. The future was dead, because Jesus was dead.

As if there weren't already enough sorrow, Mary found evidence that Jesus' grave had been tampered with. The holy place was desecrated. The forces of darkness, it appeared, had even claimed Jesus' body. Now there was no longer even the comfort of a grave site. "We don't know where Jesus is," Mary cried over and over. Tears blurred her vision as she contemplated this fresh hurt.

Many of Jesus' followers today know what it is like to feel the Lord's absence acutely: times when, even if he is around, we cannot see him. We cannot find him because pain blinds us or the question Why? Why? Why? throbs in our thoughts. If God is good, then why does life have to be this way?

There are times when the darkness is as deep as the dead of night. But often a vague kind of grayness overshadows us, veiling our sight. Where are we supposed to go with our lives? Why must we grope our way through the gloom into the future?

Not even the sight of angels could clear the tears out of Mary's eyes. Determined to go on with her search, Mary turned from the tomb. There in the shadows she saw Jesus, but did not recognize him. "Woman, why are you weeping?" he asked. He must be the gardener, Mary thought. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away," Mary answered. She must find the Lord.

But then the living Lord found her! "Mary," he said. He called her by name, "Mary." As Mary tried to see in the shadows, Jesus' dear voice found her. His voice gently touched her troubled heart. And then she recognized him. The Lord was near, and he was alive! The Lord found Mary in the gloom.

Think of what this meant. It meant that while it was still dark, the stone was moved. While it was



still dark, God raised Jesus Christ to new life. Before daybreak, God was already up and working to overcome the horror of Friday. Death seemed then to have brought down a curtain of darkness forever. Death gloated in its victory. But God wasn't finished yet!

Unheard by human ear, while it was still dark, God thundered, "No, death! No! You shall not have the final word on my Son. You shall not have the final word, period!"

Friends, Christ arose while it was still dark. He was alive before dawn, before those who loved him were able to see and believe. Although Mary felt lost and alone, Jesus wasn't far away. The Lord was already alive, already reaching out to her again—while it was still dark. Hope was alive. Dreams were alive. The future was alive, brimming with possibility—brimming with life. Jesus was alive!

Surely our tender Shepherd wants to find us in the gloom, and to call us by name. Surely he can still override despair. It is as Psalm 23 says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (KJV). And because the living Lord is with us, new life is possible. Healing, freedom, forgiveness, new directions are all possible for us. Our future is alive!

For whether we can see him or not, Jesus is alive. That is a promise. Jesus is with us in the shadows, no matter how deep or frightening they are. That is a promise. Love is alive, and he is Lord of heaven and earth. That is a promise. Rest on the promise, and do not reproach yourself if your eyes are filled with tears and your heart cries, "Where? Where are you?" as Mary did. Jesus hears you. He is making his way to you even now. Wait! Listen for the Lord to call your name. Listen for him to touch you with his voice.

We are on the threshold of dawn. Wait until the day is here, when all will walk by the light of the world—Jesus. Wait with joy, until he takes us to the city where there is no more darkness, and no more night, and it will be Easter forever. Amen.