Marlene's Meditations

Jesus' Silence

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"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." John 20:17

A strong pattern in the Bible is missing elements and their significance. In John 20:17, Mary Magdalene sat alone at the empty tomb, weeping desperately, agonizing over the disappearance of her beloved Savior's body. She thought someone had stolen Him, and she determined to honor Him in His death.

She stared again into the empty grave, and this time, she saw the two angels. Mary Magdalene boldly answered their question. She wept because someone had stolen Jesus' body, and she couldn't anoint Him. Mary Magdalene, probably sensing someone behind her, turned herself back and thought she was looking at the gardener. She answered His questions about why she was crying and Who she sought. She requested Jesus' body so that she could recover it. Jesus spoke her name—Mary.

Jesus' next words—found in John 20:17—thrill us today as He assures Mary that He is risen and grants her the honor of being the first to tell His brethren about the resurrection.

However, note the missing element in the verse. In Mary Magdalene's story, not only is the tomb empty—missing its body—but Jesus' words to her omit a critical command. He does not tell her to stop crying. Understanding this omission reveals wisdom we can apply.

Why was Jesus silent about asking Mary Magdalene to quit crying? Crying is healthy and releases our emotions, and we proceed to think more clearly when we move past our turbulent emotions. Even Jesus wept at Lazarus' grave. Often, our first desire demands we help dry our friend's tears. But, Jesus left out the first words we typically speak into our friend's distress. Why did He not ask Mary Magdalene to dry her tears?

I asked my daughter—an elementary music teacher with many years of experience a question. "How do you get a child to stop crying without telling them to stop crying?" Her answers echo Jesus' conversation with Mary Magdalene. When a child in her class sobbed uncontrollably, she would:

Say their name
Ask them what's wrong.
Find an action for them to engage in.
Embed the action with immediacy.

Say their name.

Jesus said Mary's name. Names are important, and the Bible overflows with their importance, beginning with the many names of God in which He reveals Himself to mankind. He has designed us to naturally respond instinctively to our name when it is spoken. Saying your friend's name simply reorients their thinking brain to focus on you and affirms their importance in your heart.

When we bend over the vast maw of our empty lives and fear the void, can you hear Jesus' voice calling your name? In a crisis, God created a desire in us to crave hearing our name spoken in love. One of the most important treasures we can offer to someone in their grief is to speak their name with love and care.

Ask them what's wrong.

Jesus asked her two questions: why was she crying and whom did she seek? He knew the incredible impact of expressing our distress which helps us to return to clear thinking and sets apart the tragedy from our identity.

When life shocks us to the core, speaking to a friend or counselor helps separate the confusion and emotional noise from our perceptions. Talking about our distress clears mental corridors and prepares us for healing.

Find an action for them to engage in.

Jesus refocused Mary Magdalene by offering her a breathtaking honor: to go tell His brethren of His resurrection. He asked her to act, engaging herself in a physical task that would bring her great joy.

When we freeze as bad news hits us, loved ones may encourage us to physically move. Taking action of some kind reconnects us to reality. Even completing simple tasks such as drinking water or talking thaws our icy shock. Changing position aids in looking beyond our emergency and entering the next stage of acceptance.

Embed the action with immediacy.

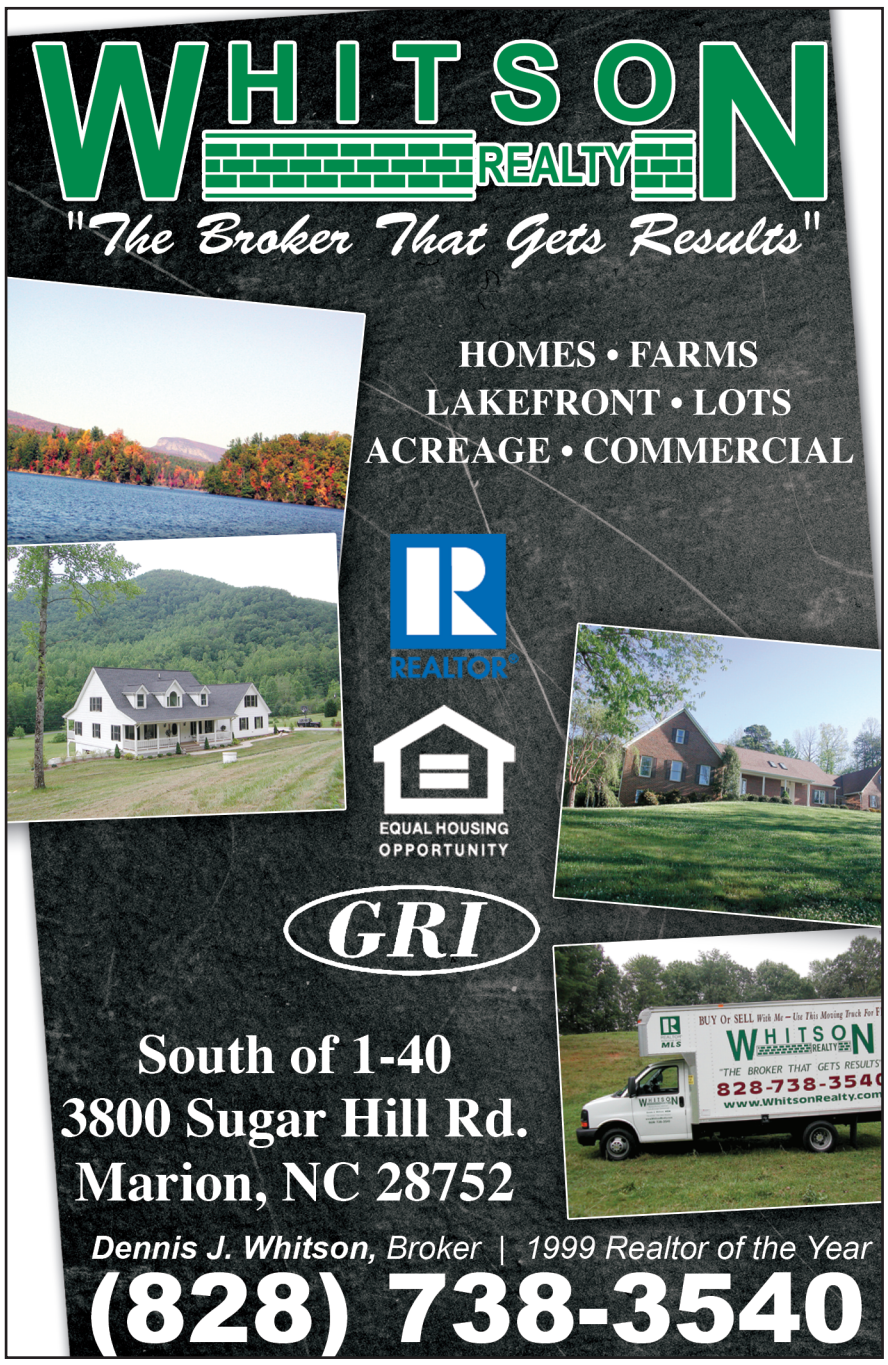
As Jesus requested Mary Magdalene to go tell His brethren the great news of His rising from the dead, He saturated His request with the idea of immediacy, of the urgency of the hour. The command rang with clarity—go.
As we respond to our emergencies, emotions rise to the surface as is normal. At some point though, doing something physical helps alleviate the surreal feeling of being trapped in a bubble and removed from others.

The ultimate joy in Mary Magdalene's life broke her bubble and rushed in when Jesus removed the great stone of lack of understanding. Her dreams and expectations, whatever they were, didn't quite reach Jesus' stunning resurrection from the dead. When she realized the significance of the empty tomb and turned away from her own understanding, Mary realized the full joy of focusing on Jesus in times of crisis.

Who rolls away the stone at the grave of your dreams and hopes? Who shows you the meaning of your personal empty tomb? Who shows you how the death of your hopes opens His door to incredible joy and a shining future with Jesus?

Can you leave the empty tomb of your expectations and plans and run to tell others of the future that Jesus has given you? Whatever His plans, you will revel in the rightness of your new life beyond your sadness. Resurrection is coming for our sorrows, and, even though we think our lives end at a tomb, God shows us the brilliant light of His truth. He proves our lives grow beyond the death of our dreams and meld into His greater glorious plan for us.

Jesus says our name, asks us questions, tells us to go tell His Gospel news, and imparts a sense of urgency with His command. We can journey by faith beyond weeping into the joyous light of His presence. What a difference Jesus' silence reveals when He does not directly command to stop weeping, but gently turns us to great truth which dries our tears!

Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehouk@bellsouth.net Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene's website: www.MarleneHouk.com

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