

Do you remember the day your computer died? The morning you woke up to a blue screen of death. The night you went to bed wondering if it all were lost? Oh, it's an awful feeling, isn't it? Stomach-churning, body-tensing, heart-pounding dread - Now what? What's next? What do I do? What's wrong with me? And when do computers die? When do screens turn blue? When do phones go dead? It's not when they're empty and you're ready to dump them, is it? They die when you've given them your best. They die when they have what you need. They die when they hold your hopes and your dreams. And when they die, it's one of your worst days ever.

Mary didn't have a computer, but she knew a thing or two about worst days. We're told that in her former life she had seven demons working their demon thing inside her. We're not told what those demons did to her. I don't imagine they were making her life better. Now I don't know if you've ever dealt with someone demon-possessed or demon-tortured. I'm not absolutely sure I have. I think of someone back in Colorado, the look on his face, in his eyes, the sound of his voice, what he was saying - all of it was tortured with the feel, the sound, and the work of hell. I think of a young school mom talking about her grandparents' experience in the old country - a life of dread, demon-dread. For Mary to have had seven demons working their evil in her, Mary knew a thing or two about worst days.

And you and me? Whether we've known demons at work in our life or not, whether we've known someone else with demons or not, we all know what it's like to have demon powers tear into our lives, don't we? Nightmares and voices that torture our nights. Addictions and urges that take control. Feelings and voices that put us in a state of dread; voices that whisper and scream: "You're no good"; voices and urges that demand anger and hate. Imagine, not just a moment, not just a passing day, but imagine living day-in and day-out tortured by demon lies. Mary knew a thing or two about the worst of days.

And then she met Jesus. Not just in passing. Jesus drove seven demons from her. And she didn't just go on her way; she started a new life

and went with Jesus on his way. With the disciples, with several other women, Mary joined Jesus. I wish we knew more about her. Was she there when Jesus invited the beaten-down with a promise: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** Was she there when Jesus gave the broken-hearted hope with a promise: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”**? Was she there when Jesus told the “sinful” woman who anointed him, or the paralyzed man who must have thought God was against him: **“Your sins are forgiven you”**? Was she there when Jesus said: **“I am the Good Shepherd ... I am the resurrection and the Life ... I am the way and the truth and the life”**? Was she there? We know she was around enough, heard enough, saw enough, knew enough to live her life, to give her life, to following Jesus and supporting his ministry. Yes, Mary knew Jesus and now she was living a new day - instead of tortured by demons, she was living and sharing a life of peace and hope.

And then Thursday night, Friday morning, Jesus is arrested. Was she there Good Friday morning when the crowds were shouting: “Crucify him”? We know she was there later on Good Friday, watching from a distance, watching what they did to Jesus on the cross, watching and waiting and hoping for what? Until with a shout - **“It is finished ....”** Until with a shout - **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”** Until Jesus bowed his head and gave up his life. Then Mary, with the other women, watched as Joseph (not Christmas Joseph, but Joseph of Arimathea) and Nicodemus bury Jesus.

Then what? Friday night, Saturday night, how do you think Mary slept, if she slept? Sweet dreams filled with the promises of Jesus? Or nightmares haunting with the bloody sights and sounds of the cross? On Saturday, how do you think the Passover meal tasted with her stomach churning? Now, this Sunday morning, what is on Mary’s mind? Burying a dead Jesus. All the peace and hope and joy that Jesus had given her was erased with a scene of crosses and cruelty, darkness and death. And then what? What could she look forward to? More demons? More nightmares? More guilt, more shame for getting her hopes up, for believing in Jesus? More hopeless, peace-less days and nights?

Mary never had to find out. On Easter Sunday morning, when Mary and the women go to the tomb to make sure Jesus is buried right, they find the stone rolled away from Jesus' tomb. And Jesus? He's gone! Mary runs to tell Peter and John. Peter and John run back ahead of Mary. First Peter and then John enter the tomb. They see what the women saw: Jesus was gone. But his grave clothes were still there - not unraveled and tossed like a thief was at work, but all folded-up, nice and neat. For Peter and John, a little bit of Easter clicks and they went back to where they were staying.

But Mary stayed, crying. She was still stuck on Jesus dead. She looks inside the tomb; two angels ask her: "Why are you crying?" She's so stuck in her darkness that when someone else asks, "Why are you crying?" she doesn't recognize that it's Jesus. She thinks he must be the gardener and hopefully he knew what had been done with Jesus' body. Mary was so stuck on thinking Jesus was dead, she didn't recognize Jesus until Jesus stopped her with a word, her name - Mary.

And it was a new day. The darkness was gone; the Light had come. She could see beyond the cross to see Jesus alive. She could see beyond the grave to see life together with Jesus. Mary was so overjoyed to see Jesus, she grabbed hold of him. Jesus had to remind her that he wasn't sticking around. He would be ascending into heaven, returning to his God and Father in heaven, and Jesus added, returning to our God and Father in heaven. With that, Mary was the first to be able to say with Easter joy: "I have seen the Lord!"

For Mary, it was a new day. Jesus' invitation still stood. Jesus' promise still stood. Jesus' forgiveness ... now Jesus' word of forgiveness was backed up by his work of forgiveness - her demon-tortured past - all forgiven and forgotten by God; those things she said and did, the worst of her thoughts - all covered over, paid for, forgiven and gone! Jesus was alive! He wasn't buried, dead and done - he was headed to heaven to keep his promises - his promises for Mary, his promises for you!

What does that mean for us? Easter means a new day! We don't have to live like the demon lies are true. We don't have to live like the nightmares

are true. We don't have to live like the voices that haunt us are true. Jesus is alive. Death and the devil and all his demons couldn't hold on to him, and with Jesus, they can't hold on to you. All the evil, all the darkness of this world couldn't stop Jesus. All of our sin, our shame, the dark corners of our hearts couldn't stop Jesus from stepping in for us, for you - taking our place as sinner, taking our place as guilty before God, taking our place under judgment before God. All the evil out there, all the evil in here (my heart), all the crosses out there couldn't stop Jesus from stepping in to set you right by God for life right with God, for a new day of life the way it's supposed to be.

What does that mean for us? Jesus is alive with God's invitation - "Come to me!" Jesus is alive with God's forgiveness - "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" - with Jesus you don't have God scowling at you; you have God smiling on you with peace! With Jesus, you can know - Jesus is alive with God's promise - "I've got you! I've got all your crosses and troubles covered. I've got your death done. I've got you safe with me - forever!" With Jesus, we get to live a new day alive, alive with peace and joy and hope in the promise of God.

Yes, with Jesus, we get to look past the crosses and past the grave. With Jesus, we get to look forward to a new day without tears or fears. We get to look forward to a new day light and bright in the blessing of God. Amen.