

# **CHURCH- A TOMB OR THE DOORWAY TO LIFE?**



***Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."***

*John 20:1-2*

There is a very good reason why on Sunday mornings when you drive past flea markets the lots are loaded with cars. There's a very good reason why in the summertime when we drive past Lawrencetown Beach on our way here, the place is already starting to fill.

It's not that these people don't believe in God!

If you were to ask these folks enjoying themselves at the flea market or the beach or a host of other places whether they believe in God, most would say, "Of course, I believe in God." And if you were to ask, "Then why aren't you in church?", they'd laugh, "What has that got to do with it? Church? What makes you think you're going to find God in church? Here at the beach, I can see blue sky, hear the waves...".

For these people, and perhaps for many of us, going to church is like Mary Magdalene going to the tomb to look after a corpse.

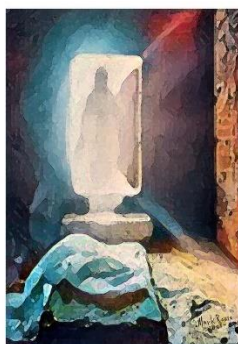
It's a duty.  
Somebody has to look after the corpse.

How long do you think the disciples of Jesus would have kept coming together if, when they got to the tomb that morning, Jesus' corpse was still a corpse?

The whole thing would have fallen apart in no time. Peter would have gone back to fishing. Matthew would have picked up where he left off at the tax office. Mary Magdalene and the women would have kept putting fresh flowers at the mouth of the tomb and that would have been it.

The thing that fired these men and women was that the tomb wasn't a tomb any more.

**They encountered Jesus, blazing with life...  
and that life ignited their hearts, changed them.**



For the rest of their lives when they came together to break bread in His name, there was nothing tomb-like about it.

It was the high point of their week.

It was the source of their life.

They wouldn't think of missing it because here's where they got their strength.

The Holy Spirit came down upon them as they worshiped and brought Christ into their hearts afresh.

**They weren't coming to a tomb.**

**They were coming to the doorway of life itself.**

So what are our churches?



**Are they tombs or are they doorways to the Risen Lord?**

Now we have to conclude that the people who attend once or twice and never come back probably found them to be more like tombs.

A tomb is a place where you pay your respects to someone who's no longer around.

A tomb is a place where you comfort yourself with memories.

It's always a little depressing. People are trying to be cheerful and smile, "Well, I went. I suffered through it. I did my duty." And they leave the tomb, go home and have lunch.

Then one day someone comes into a gathering for the first time expecting it to be a tomb and, like Mary Magdalene, they get a surprise. In the midst of all the stuff going on they hear a voice...

***Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).***

*John 20:15b-16*

**Alive from the dead - never to die again.**

Speaking to this person.

Speaking to you.

That's what gathering together is all about.

**Every time we gather together in his name, the Risen Lord comes among us and speaks.**

When you hear Him, when you get even just a fraction of what He's saying to you, you discover that now *you're* the one rising from the dead.

Why is it that some people have this experience and others don't?

Why is it that sometimes we hear his voice and we recognize it and sometimes we don't?

What does it take for us to be able to discern the presence of the Risen Lord in our gathered fellowships?

The first person to see Jesus alive from the dead was Mary Magdalene. So, she's our guide. It's no accident that the Risen Lord came first to her.

There were certain things about Mary Magdalene that made this possible.

## **Healing**

First of all Mary Magdalene had been healed of seven devils. Her mind was gone, her life was a mess, and then Jesus *delivered* her.

Most of us don't have to look very far into the past to find evidence of some kind of healing in our lives - healing from Christ.

Healing brought to us through someone's prayers.

Healing brought to us through the laying on of hands.

Healing brought to us through a spoken word that gave us hope.

If that hasn't happened to you yet, let it happen today.

Bring that need with you, that condition, that fear, that frightful secret, bring it to the rail, bring it to your prayer closet, bring it when you come for communion.

**Ask the Lord Jesus to heal you and He will.**



## **Submit to his Teachings**

Secondly, Mary Magdalene had submitted herself to this man as her teacher. That's why the first exclamation out of her mouth was, "Rabboni!", (teacher).

She'd been following him around.

Drinking in his teachings.

Applying them to her daily life.

In fact, all the people who saw Jesus alive from the dead were people who had soaked in his teachings.

Nobody else saw him.

In most cases, before you know him as your Risen Lord, you're first going to know him as teacher.

**You're going to put yourself under the authority of his Word.**



That's why the stress in any fellowship or gathering should be on the Word.

The Word incarnate in this man Jesus. Because the Word, and only the Word is the doorway to meeting him alive from the dead.

### **Committed to his Kingdom**

Thirdly, Mary Magdalene had committed herself to his work.

Scripture tells us that Mary and some other women traveled around with Jesus and the disciples ministering to them out of their substance. In other words – paying the bills.

**She wasn't just a spectator, she was a participant, she put something into it.**



Maybe there was a time when she was into other things - perfectly legitimate things. But now, her heart is focused on the #1 priority.

**She's committed to the work of the kingdom as Jesus makes it clear.  
This is the focus of her life, and she has no regrets.**

All the other stuff pales compared to the work of the kingdom.

### **Keep Drawing Near**

Finally, Mary Magdalene was still making an effort to draw near to Jesus, even if all that was left of him, as far as she knew, was a corpse. She's drawing near in the only way she knows, and as she does, he draws near to her in resurrection power. "Mary!", "Teacher!"

That's how it works.

**If you draw near to Christ in the best way you know how, he draws near to you.  
You take that one step toward him, he takes 10 steps toward you.**



There are plenty of people in the world today who think of church as a tomb and often they're right.

Who wants to keep going to a tomb?

But we are in the presence of the One....

**... Who knows how to transform a tomb into a doorway to blazing life.**

**... Who has already touched many of us with his healing hand.**

**If we seek healing from Christ.  
If we are submitting ourselves to him as teacher,  
If we are committed to what he's about, his kingdom,  
If we are serious about drawing near to him,**

Jesus himself visits us through the Spirit, with power, every time we come together, and we leave our gatherings.....



**Knowing that we have been in the presence of the Risen Lord...  
Recharged with the power of his endless life.**

**May that be our experience each time we gather in his name.**

*Prayer-Yes Lord may our gatherings be doors to blazing life instead of tombs filled with corpses and death. And Lord as we gather, come among us, speak to us, lift us from death. Heal us Lord, heal us. Help us to submit to your amazing teachings, your living and beautiful words. Help us to commit ourselves in every way to your Kingdom, making you the focus of our lives and our gatherings. Oh Lord, help us to draw near to you, to desire your holy presence as we gather. And may those who find their ways into our gatherings be surprised and pleased that we are not tombs mourning a dead body...but find us truly gathered around, imbued with, and worshiping your living presence and may their souls be ignited with your life and changed forever as they themselves turn from death to life, to you our Living God. Amen.*

*Maranatha Mirror*

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Featured Art: Mark Rouse at [markrouseartpatternbyetsy.com](http://markrouseartpatternbyetsy.com), First photo monumental grave markers by Tony Mould, and Mary Magdalene by Chris Higham at [builtonrock.org/uk](http://builtonrock.org/uk)

## **Maranatha Mirror Messages**

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THE LAMB  
WHO WAS SLAIN  
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN