even named. Yet, in the resurrection stories from all four gospels, women are the first witnesses. Women are the ones who deliver the shocking, good news of Jesus’ resurrection to doubtful people. This is surprising because in a patriarchal culture, women had no public credibility. Viewed as fickle and gullible, and ruled by their emotions, a woman’s testimony was not admissible in court under Jewish law. And yet, God chooses women as the first witnesses of the resurrection. God chooses Mary Magdalene to preach the very first Easter sermon. Women are the last people standing at the foot of the cross and the first people to receive the good news at the empty tomb.

Peter and John take Mary seriously, however, and they respond to her news by running to the tomb. Arriving first, John peers into the tomb, but he does not go inside. Coming in second, Peter enters the tomb, and sees both the wrappings and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head. Strangely, the cloth is “*rolled up in a place by itself*” (v. 7), which is a clue that maybe the disappearance of Jesus was not a robbery. What grave-robber would take the time to roll up a cloth and carefully lay it aside?

When John enters the tomb, the gospel says that “he saw and believed” (v. 8). That is a curious phrase, which leaves us wondering exactly what it was that convinced John of the resurrection truth. Perhaps it was the empty tomb. Perhaps it was the linen cloths. Perhaps it was the memory of Jesus’ saying he would rise again in three days. Perhaps it was the truth of Mary’s testimony. It is also probable that John did not yet believe that Jesus had conquered death, for the gospel tells us that he and Peter “*did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead*” (v. 9). At this point, it is enough to see the empty tomb and believe. Then Peter and John return to their homes. They are done running, for now.

Mary stays weeping at the tomb. She does not drop out of the marathon just yet. Looking into the tomb again, she sees two angels dressed in white and tells them she is weeping because someone has taken away her Lord. A moment later, she turns, sees a man she assumes to be the gardener, and says to him, “*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away*” (vv. 11-15). For Mary, Easter morning begins not with joy, but with weeping and grief. Mary is hitting Heartbreak Hill at mile 20 of the Boston Marathon. If you are feeling the same way, do not lose heart. Hang in there, just as Mary did. It is natural to struggle with doubt and uncertainty, especially when we are being challenged by something we have never seen before.

But Jesus sees Mary. He calls her name, “Mary!” She turns and says, “Rabbouni!” which means “teacher” (v. 16). Amid Mary’s pain and struggle, Jesus sees her for who she is. The very same is true for you and for me. Wherever we are on the marathon of faith development, Jesus sees us, he recognizes us. All we need do is respond. Say “yes” to Jesus and let him be your Savior and Teacher. Jesus says to Mary, “*Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*’” (v. 17). Jesus sends her. He is telling her: Run, Mary, run! Jesus commands Mary to go and tell the great and glorious news that he is alive forevermore. So, she goes and announces to the disciples, “*I have seen the Lord”* (v. 18).

There are four things (at least) that this story shows us about becoming apostles, evangelists like Mary Magdalene. First is this: it does not matter who you are, the message is the most important thing. The Gospels suggest quite strongly that Jesus, and our witness to his resurrection life, belongs to people who have little to lose when it comes to worldly status. Jesus ministered to lepers, cripples, drunkards, foreigners, prisoners, slaves, women, and children because they had the most to gain from his message of hope and salvation. People like Mary Magdalene. Being a witness to the good news of the resurrection is a role open to anyone who believes Jesus’ message of grace and redemption.

The second thing about being an apostle is this: you must investigate the tomb for yourself. You need to go right up to the scariest, ugliest, saddest place in the world, before the sun is risen, and look without flinching into every dark corner. Even when it makes you weep, go right up to the tomb, and look inside. The story of Mary Magdalene shows us that we need not be afraid, because becoming an apostle requires you to experience Christ crucified. You cannot be an evangelist for the resurrection of Jesus unless you experience the tomb first.

The third requirement for becoming an apostle is simple: you need to talk to the gardener. It may be a stranger who comes to you in your worst moment, when you are alone and weeping over the murder of your friend, and who offers you a word of hope. Becoming an apostle requires accepting good news from unlikely people. It means listening for the Word of resurrection in the most unlikely places. Becoming an apostle requires us to hear God’s good news in whatever form and from whatever messenger God sends it.

The last thing about becoming an apostle is probably the hardest to do: You must run and tell your friends that Christ is risen. “Listen, I have seen the Lord!” They will not necessarily want to hear it, but do not be discouraged. This is good news, life-saving news, and they need to hear it. Say it loudly. Say it proudly. Christ is risen!

Mary did just that, telling all who would hear about the resurrection of Jesus. According to Orthodox Christian legend, Mary even sought an audience with the Roman Emperor, Tiberius Caesar. As was the custom for anyone appearing before Caesar, Mary brought a gift: a plain, ordinary egg. She stood before the imperial throne, held out the egg and greeted Tiberias, declaring: “Christ is Risen!” She told him about her teacher and savior, Jesus, and the unfair treatment and execution he received from Caesar’s own governor, Pontius Pilate. She also told Caesar how Jesus rose from the dead and appeared, alive, to her and to his disciples.

Caesar responded with bored disbelief: “How can anyone rise from the dead? That’s as impossible as that egg in your hand turning red.” Miraculously, the egg in Mary’s hand turned from white to a deep red. In Orthodox iconography, Mary Magdalene is often depicted with a red egg in her hand, sometimes with the words, “Christ is Risen,” spelled out on it in tiny letters. Mary told anyone who would listen about Jesus’ resurrection and of the forgiveness, grace, mercy, and new life he offered all who would believe.

Mary crosses the finish line strong, as the very first apostle. Although she struggled at mile 20, she flies past mile 26.2, carrying the message that she saw the risen Jesus. Easter is an invitation to all Christians, both men and women, to run together. We are people equally recognized by Jesus, and equally sent out as messengers with glorious, good news for the world. Wherever you are on your personal marathon, know that you do not run alone. Jesus sees you. In the middle of your pain and confusion, he calls you by name. Then he sends you off toward the finish line that lies before you. Mary is already on the run. Our challenge today is to follow her example.

Easter Blessing: May God, who comes to us in the things of this world, bless your eyes and be in your seeing. May Christ, who looks upon you with deepest love, bless your eyes and widen your gaze. May the Spirit, who perceives what is and what may yet be, bless your eyes and sharpen your vision. May the Sacred Three bless your eyes and cause you to see. Amen.

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**Run, Mary, Run!**

Sunday, April 17, 2022 [John 20:1-18](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3a1-18&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Tomorrow (April 18, 2022) will see a lot of foot traffic on the road between Hopkinton and Boston, Massachusetts as The Boston Marathon gets underway. Tens of thousands of runners will race to complete the 26.2-mile course. This is an anniversary year for the Boston Marathon, as it was 50 years ago, April 17, 1972, that the Boston Marathon first allowed women to compete. Nina Kuscsik emerged from the field to win the women’s race, and all eight of the female runners completed the course.

For 75 years, the Boston Marathon excluded women from the race, underestimating their ability to compete. One running coach believed the distance was too much for what he called “fragile” women. Roberta (Bobbi) Gibb knew better. She was the first woman to run the full Boston Marathon. The year was 1966, and since Roberta could not get an official race number she hid in the bushes and jumped into the race when it began.

One year later, Kathrine Switzer registered as K.V. Switzer, not identifying herself as a woman. When she began to run, race officials tried to remove her from the marathon. One of them grabbed her shoulders and tried to take away her number. Switzer’s boyfriend shoved the man aside and Switzer finished the race in four hours and 20 minutes. Only when the Amateur Athletics Union accepted women into long-distance running did Boston finally open the race to everyone.

Just as 1972 was a turning point for female runners, Easter morning was a moment of truth for the followers of Jesus. Early on the first day of the week, while it is still dark, Mary went to the tomb. She was the first of the followers of Jesus to make this trip. She arrived before Peter, before John, before any of the men. What Mary sees is that “*the stone…removed from the tomb*” (John 20:1). This discovery upsets her as she assumed grave robbers to be responsible. She runs to Simon Peter and to John, and says to them, “*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him*” (v. 2). Notice that she calls Jesus “the Lord,” and she says to them that “*we* do not know where they have laid him.” By this, Mary identifies herself as part of the community of believers, as a follower of Jesus. Clearly, there were more than 12 disciples and not all of them were men.

Women get short shrift in the Bible. They are routinely dismissed, underestimated, subjected to violence, and degraded as second-class citizens. Many times, women are not