

## **The Hungry Spirit...Filled**

**Jeremiah 31:1-6; John 20:1-18**

March 23, 2008 – Easter  
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Did any of you read about Scott Silverman Day? It was last month and way out in San Diego, so you may have missed it. The city leaders declared one day as “Scott Silverman Day” to honor a man who has instilled hope in people who believed there was none.

To appreciate his story, though, you have to go back twenty-three years. To the 44<sup>th</sup> floor of an office building in San Diego. And an open window before which he stood. Scott’s life was caving in around him. Two decades of substance abuse, blackouts, and depression had brought him to that moment. He was about to step through that window, when a colleague walked into the room.

The next day Scott entered rehab. There he found help. He found hope. And he found his calling. He used the experiences from those two decades to connect with people who were going through similar circumstances, people who bottomed out, who thought they had no future, who felt hopeless. He started an organization called Second Chance to serve what he calls a “difficult to serve” population. To date, twenty four thousand people—inmates, drug addicts, homeless people, the mentally ill—have been helped by Second Chance. It is making such a difference in San Diego, California, that the city leaders there chose to honor Scott Silverman.

Anthony Panarella is a graduate of Second Chance. He is an ex-con who learned how to write a resume, how to conduct an interview, and how to be a responsible employee. Anthony says he’s going to make it. He said, “Little kids have Superman or Spiderman. I have Scott Silverman.” (CNN web article, March 20, 2008)

That’s what people need, isn’t it? We just can’t live without hope. We all have a deep need to believe that the dreams and hopes of our lives can and will be filled.

That's why the text from Jeremiah is listed as an alternative reading for today in the common lectionary. The people of Israel were in need of a second chance. They had lost something most precious to them—their land. It's hard for many of us to appreciate how important the land is to Jews today. We need to remember that it is their Promised Land. It is God's gift, they believe, to their fathers and mothers. Jeremiah was a prophet at a time when the people of Israel had lost their land. They were in forced exile in a foreign country. They became obsessed with a sense of hopelessness, that they might never touch foot on their land again, may never till and care for it and live from it. That loss created a sense of hopelessness, a fear that God had abandoned them. They, of all the peoples of the earth, they, the chosen ones, were a people without hope.

But this text from Jeremiah, as you heard, is a celebration. They lost their land, yes, but God has promised them a second chance, the hope that they would return to the land, that their hungry spirits would be filled once again. With that background, listen to Jeremiah 31 again:

*I have loved you with an  
everlasting love;  
Therefore I have continued my  
faithfulness to you.  
Again I will build you, and you  
shall be built,  
O virgin Israel!  
Again you shall take your  
tambourines,  
And go forth in the dance of the  
merrymakers.  
Again you shall plant vineyards  
on the mountain of Samaria;  
The planters shall plant,  
and shall enjoy the fruit.  
For there shall be a day when  
sentinels will call  
in the hill country of Ephraim:  
'Come, let us go up to Zion,  
to the Lord our God.'*

It was a word of hope. They would possess their land again. They would plant their vineyards again. They would go up to Zion, to the Temple, to their God again. God even calls them “O virgin Israel.” Everything would be made new, pure, for God’s people.

And we all need that, don’t we? That’s why we need Easter. Easter is about second chances for our hungry spirits, being made new, filled once again. It is about old rugged crosses coming to life again. That’s exactly what Mary Magdalene needed. Have you ever notice that in John’s gospel Mary Magdalene goes to the Garden Tomb alone? In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Mary is part of a group of women goes to the tomb. But in John, Mary is alone. I’ve wondered if that was John’s way of telling us something about Mary, maybe that she was “alone” in a deeper and more profound sense. She wasn’t just by herself, without company. Mary was *alone*.

While alone, Mary made the discovery we celebrate today—the tomb was empty. This must have compounded sense of aloneness, for she thought someone had stolen Jesus’ body. John says that she ran to tell Peter and another disciple the news. They then ran to the tomb and saw for themselves. They saw the burial cloths alright. But she was right; there was no corpse. Do you remember what happened next to Peter and the other disciple? John says that one of them believed and then they both went home. End of story for Peter and that other disciple.

The real drama of this text revolves around Mary Magdalene, not those two disciples. John says that Mary Magdalene went back to the tomb; again she was alone. If it was indeed the tomb I visited last year, it is garden-like. The tomb itself is hewn into a mountainside. We stooped to enter the doorway into the tomb. Inside it had probably 200 square feet of space that was divided into several small chambers. One chamber is where a body could have been laid.

John says that Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping. Remember, she was alone. “She bent over to look into the tomb,” John says. She saw two angels. They said, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She expressed her sadness that someone had taken Jesus’ body. John says that at that moment she turned and saw Jesus, but she didn’t know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to this alone woman, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

Thinking him to be the gardener she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

“Mary,” Jesus said. And in that instant, Mary recognized that it was Jesus, and she was no longer alone.

Now, we don’t know why Mary didn’t recognize Jesus earlier. Maybe she was just too distraught. Maybe she had tears in her eyes. For some reason, Mary didn’t recognize Jesus, until he called her name. But when she heard her name, Mary turned and called out in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” which means “teacher.” And apparently she grabbed hold of Jesus, maybe hoping to never be alone again.

Jesus told Mary not to hold onto him. I think it was his way of telling her not to hold him back because his work was not finished. He told her to go instead to his brothers—those two who had gone back home and the others—and tell them the good news. I would love to have been there when Mary arrived at where the disciples were staying. I can see her out of breath, disheveled, trying to talk, eyes as wide as saucers: “I have seen the Lord,” she declared, and then told them of all that she had experienced.

Another chance—at life, at hope, at making a difference. Another chance to have a hungry spirit filled. I wish we knew more about what happened to Mary. Some stories suggest that she went on to be a great apostle, a great servant of her resurrected Lord, empowered by the belief that she would never again be alone.

That’s our Easter message. It’s for people who feel hopeless, abandoned, alone. It’s for people who, for whatever reason, need a second chance. Isn’t it a message for every one of us? On Easter morning God reaffirms God’s everlasting love, inviting us to take up our tambourines, to go forth and dance with the merrymakers. So dance today. Here is our second chance. Embrace it and celebrate life!

### Closing Prayer

Resurrected Lord, you call our names now. Help us to hear and to join in the dance. Amen.