

Lessons:

John 20:1-19

After three days of head-hanging suffering, restless waiting, constant praying, crying, worrying, and mourning outside that tomb, you and I are finally here -- Easter is finally here -- and it is just fantastic to see all of you!

The flowers, the music, the fanfare!

I think Deacon Al even shaved- (And Ida May too!)

And today you and I join Mary Magdalene -- early in the morning -- We join her in Jerusalem -- For it is a day of surprises!

There we are, 2,008 years ago this morning -- But it is, not yet, a happy day.

We are the faithful friends this morning -- and it is early morning, it is still dark -- and we're wearing black and we're mourning.

Innocently, and sadly, we are walking to the tomb of a loved one to continue paying our grieving respects.

And you and I are there as Mary Magdalene gets the shock of her life -- as she turns the corner and finds that someone's tampered with the tomb -- The doorway of the tomb of the Beloved One no longer has a stone in front of it -- It is wide open!

And we don't know what to do -- So we run home -- and we fetch our friends.

Two of them come right away -- One younger, that's John, he's the fast, but timid one -- And an older one, that's Peter, he's the slowpoke, but a brash heckler who would walk, without knocking, right into anybody's tomb, empty or occupied, thank you very much.

And they arrive at Jesus' grave -- Archaeologists say the burial cave was about 3 feet high -- And the stone used to seal it was a heavy one -- grave robbing being the 20th century equivalent of home invasion robberies -- you need a good dead bolt!

And while John gets there first and waits, Peter strolls right on in -- And they both discovered right away that Mary was correct, no one's home.

The men poke around for a bit -- and seeing nothing other than a few burial wrappings around -- they shrug their shoulders, scratch their heads, and head home.

But not Mary -- And not you, and not me -- We stick around -- We are there, not just grieving, but wondering -- "What the heck is going on?"

"Who has taken His body - the Romans, the Jews, the gardener?"

Which is when we come face to face with one of the more curious and recurring realities of the resurrection story -- it's not just here, it's in other stories as well.

There, joining us, is a man. -- It is a man we all know well.

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We have had countless meals, conversations, laughs and prayers together -- yet, we do not recognize him.

Here is someone who we have grown to admire, respect, and yes, even to love -- and we're now face to face with him and don't have any idea who he is.

He's not wearing a disguise -- He hasn't changed his voice -- Heck, he hasn't even changed his shirt.

And yet there Mary is -- There we are -- And he is not recognized.

And Jesus says to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? "Whom are you looking for?"

"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."

Mary doesn't recognize him -- as we fail to recognize him

It's because Mary is looking for a grave to tend -- Mary is looking for someone who she remembered -- Not someone who is yet to be.

Mary is looking for a Jesus from her past -- Not a Jesus out of the future -- Mary is expecting someone who has acted as He has always acted.

Not someone who is so utterly unpredictable and as continuously surprising as Jesus.

This is why we find this curious exchange up next:

"Mary!" He says

"Rabbouni!" She says, finally recognizing him;

But "Don't touch me!" he adds.

Yes, Jesus says to one of his very best friends, "Don't touch me!"

And in some translations the Greek words literally read: "Don't Cling to me!"

And dear Mary Magdalene gets the very first lesson -- She is the first one to find out what every other Christian to ever follow Jesus will ever learn

It's something you and I know well:

No one can ever have Jesus on their own terms.

The Resurrection has changed everything.

No longer can Jesus simply be a warm memory. (Rowan Williams)

He has no grave that we can visit -- The Christian religion can never be about the tales of yesteryear and the sweet memories of an era gone by.

No, it is dynamic, evolving, and wide open to a future only the Father knows.

As Jesus put it:

"I am ascending to my Father"

"It is a new place, a very different place, and a place that you cannot visit."

"And even though I am in that place, I will continue to be in this place"

"But not in the same way you have known me -- "I have changed, ..."

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and the Resurrection changes everything.

Indeed, the Resurrection has changed planet Earth like nothing else.

Christianity has been the most influential force the world has ever known. -- It has built principalities and toppled kingdoms.

Every day 63,000 people around the world are baptized. -- 1,600 new churches are started. -- In the United States a new church is planted every two hours.

Christianity is currently sweeping through many parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America -- One-third of the world professes Jesus as Lord.

Sure, some predict Christianity will some day fade away -- European churchgoing is on the decline -- And today "No Religion" has become the fourth largest religion.

But regardless of where Christianity goes -- The New Testament seems to be pretty clear about the Lord's purposes for the world.

The Bible tells us that God set a plan in motion for all creation, which had a beginning and will have an end.

In writing to Christians in Ephesus in the first century, St. Paul explained that Jesus plays an integral part in that plan. -- Paul says in Ephesians that God waited until the fullness of time to send His Son, "In accordance with the eternal purpose" that God established (Ephesians 3:11).

Paul argues that as sure as there is a world, there is a God, and this God has a plan.

Christianity may amble along in fits and starts for thousands of years. -- But eventually God will bring to fruition in Christ a climax to 'all things seen and unseen.'

Christians believe all of history has a divine rationale -- there's a reason for everything.

In fact, there is a reason that you and I came here this morning.

Some of us come every week -- Some of us come not so often -- But all of us come because we think there's something to this story.

We may not be sure of Christianity or its implications -- but there is something to it.

CS Lewis put it this way.

"The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start.

"Theories as to how it did this are another matter.

"A good many theories have been held as to how it works -- "What all Christians agree on is that it does work."

Somehow this tall tale of abandoned linen hanging on an empty cross dares speak some kind of truth to our lives.

Somehow this idea that the most vivid example of a life lived not for one's self -- but for others, holds the key to fulfillment for our lives.

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Some of us are here to ring bells and cheer because our lives are going pretty well --
And some of us are here to help put our lives back together because we are hanging
onto life by a thread and are barely making it from day to day.

Most of us are probably somewhere in the middle.

But for each one of us the possibility, even the probability, that Jesus is who Jesus says
He is, -- holds out to us the promise of the best life that we could ever know.

It's because Easter Sunday is about coming home -- both literally and figuratively.

The cycle of life that God established from the beginning of Creation -- calls all things to
rise and fall, come and go, ebb and flow.

There are times in our lives when we tend to rely on ourselves more than we rely on
God. -- And there are times in our lives when we tend to rely on God more than we rely
on ourselves.

Our Easter homecoming calls us to the latter.

That's why we will pray the Baptismal Covenant this morning.

It is our 'sinner's prayer' -- It is another form of our Altar Call -- our chance to give birth
to our faith, or renew our faith and begin all over again.

We know that we are our best selves not when we treat our religion as some kind of
stone memorial that we occasionally dust off -- but we become who we are meant to be
when we move toward God -- when we let go of our burdens -- let go of the reins --
and trust the One whose very life, death and now resurrection, is utterly outside of our
control.

For that's what it all boils down to.

Who's in charge of our lives this morning? -- Is it ourselves? -- Or is it God?

Easter challenges each one of us to take our white knuckles off of the steering wheel --
and to allow God to do the driving.

Sure it may be an unpredictable, and even scary ride -- but we all know, we would like
no one else at the wheel other than Jesus.

Just ask Mary Magdalene.

It was her failure to recognize Jesus at the tomb that has everything to do with
humanity's persistent temptation to keep inside of our own self-made and self-protective
boxes.

But what do we do with a God who is constantly moving, and moving us, outside of the
box?

Easter is calling this parish -- and every one of us -- outside of ourselves -- outside of
this place -- into deeper places -- where we might not be in control, but God is.

The Church never grows when we're in charge -- it only grows when God's in charge.

"When I am lifted up," says the Christ -- "I will cause all people to come unto me."

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And that's our job this morning.

To lift Him up. -- And when we do that -- we do what Mary did.

We go and tell our friends. -- "I have seen the Lord!" -- is what she said.

"I have come face to face with love incarnate whose love for the world has just changed my life, and will change the world."

Indeed, it has, and it will.

For this is our Easter challenge.

How is Easter making a difference in our lives?

How is this love making a difference in our lives?

How is this love making a difference in the world?

Is it propelling us forward to the uncertain and unstable work of clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, helping the poor, changing the world one moment at a time?

This Spring St. David's will offer a number of outreach opportunities -- stay tuned to the bulletin and newsletter in the weeks ahead.

It's just one way our parish wants to help us be the kind of people we want to be -- an Easter People -- on and about Jesus' Easter work.

There is no other place I'd rather be. -- And everyone's welcome to join in.

Wherever we are on our spiritual journey -- however far up or far down we are on our spiritual ladders -- Easter calls us all to one thing -- to reach for the next rung -- envision that, can we, what does going to the next rung look like for us?

Going for the next level of spiritual maturity -- to new life and new sacrifice -- to new places of giving and receiving.

So come, let us journey together -- With a cup of wine and a piece of bread.

This is all the food we will ever need -- It is our sacrament and our sustenance.

Come, let us keep the feast,

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!