

John 20:1-18(NRSV)

The Resurrection of Jesus

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So 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.” ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said 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.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[b] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Risen Indeed!

Mark was four and 3/4 years old when his pet lizard died. Since it was her grandson's first brush with death, Grandma suggested that Mark and his older brother hold a "funeral" for the lizard. Grandma explained what a funeral is in terms she thought her young grandsons would understand, "It's a ceremony," she said, "where you say a prayer, sing a song, and bury your loved one." Grandma even provided a shoe box and a burial place in the backyard. The boys thought it as a great idea, so they all proceeded to the backyard. Taking the lead, Mark's older brother said a prayer. Then he turned and asked little Mark if he would like to sing a song. With tears in his eyes, Mark clasped his hands, bowed his head, took a deep breath, and belted out Ray Charles' "Hit the road, Jack! Don't you come back no more, no more, no more, no more!"

That must be what the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Caiaphas, Ananias, those who plotted the death of Jesus, even Pilate and Herod were hoping, if not singing in their hearts on Good Friday. "Hit the road, JESUS, and don't you come back no more, no more, no more, no more. Hit the road, JESUS and don't you come back no more."

But in Mark's grandmother's backyard, our story takes another twist. While hearing the song Mark chose makes *us* chuckle, our little Mark started weeping inconsolably. -- That is, until Mark heard his mother call his name! As they walked toward one another, you could literally see the tension and deep grief melt away from Mark's body as he accepted the embrace of one who offered him peace.

Many of us have memories of our mothers calling our names. When we heard just our first names, things generally were okay. But when we heard our full names, we knew we were in trouble. Full names were rarely used, unless the issue was serious! At other times a loved one calling ur name is just the consolation we need.

In the garden, on that Sunday morning following Jesus' crucifixion, Mary was deeply grieving. She was confused as to why the tomb was open and empty, and considered who might be responsible for this final act of degradation. Peter and John had come to the tomb at her request, and had gone back home. Mary was left alone to sort all of this out, and to try to figure out what to do next.

Do you remember what it is like to have raw grief grip your being? Your best friend, at 20 years of age, loses his life in a car accident. Your parent is diagnosed with liver cancer and is gone two weeks later. A family member begins experiencing symptoms for which there are only two devastating diagnosis. Your seemingly healthy spouse unexpectedly dies. Do you remember what it is like? The numbness, the anguish, the fear, the sense of hopelessness, the sharpness of every insensitive word, the inexplicable despair?

Mary's Lord, Jesus ~ the one who had given Mary her life back by exorcizing all of those demons ~ Jesus had been tortured and executed in one of the most cruel ways imaginable--while she faithfully watched! She was so full of her own confusion and sadness and trouble that she didn't even recognize Jesus when he stood before her in the garden that morning.

She was so caught up inside her own experience that she was unable to recognize his gaze or his voice when he first asked why she was weeping.

Then a wonderful thing happened. Jesus spoke and called her name; he said, "Mary," in a way that no one else addressed her. Suddenly she did recognize his voice, the voice of the Lord, and as her eyes met his, she saw the one who could look deep into her heart, see the pain and confusion, and offer her comfort to set her free from fear once again. All she needed was just one word, "Mary," and she knew instantly she was wrong to be searching for a dead Jesus; because at that moment ***she found that the living Jesus was searching for her.***

That same living Jesus is searching for us this morning. Isn't it true that sometimes when we come to church, like Mary, we are so full of our own worries and sadness that we don't see, or hear, or feel the presence of the living Jesus? Sometimes we are trying so hard to control our lives, our families, our money, our work, and our future that we don't see that Jesus is right here with us, wanting us to ***let go of our concept of the***

way things should be, and let Jesus into our lives in ways that will transform us anew!

When Jesus calls our name, the Savior does not call to scold or warn. ***Jesus calls to welcome and transform our lives.*** And we know that is risky -- for once transformed by Christ, we will never be the same again. Transformed lives will not return to the way things used to be.

We come to this Easter day, witnessing again the miracle in the garden. What was once a place of death becomes a place of incredible life. And in the midst of that life, Jesus calls our name. It is personal. We are connected to the Risen Lord. We will never be the same after this moment: ***we will be changed!*** Though we think we are the ones who are seeking the living Lord, the fact is that it is Christ who seeks and finds us. We are invited to open our hands and our hearts; we are invited to open our whole selves to Christ's saving presence. //

Have you ever noticed that when you hold something tightly in a closed fist, you can hold that item quite securely, but you cannot hold much more? When we make a fist, we can hold very little in our hands. But as we open our hands we discover we are capable of holding much more. The same is true with our hearts. If our hearts are filled with worry and sadness or plans for later, if our hearts are filled with anxieties, anger, grief and darkness to which we are holding tightly, then there may not be room for Jesus to come in.

Yet, let us not worry that our hearts are not perfect, or ready, or worthy. The fact is that none of us are ready or worthy to receive our Savior. None of us are ever really ready for Jesus. Mary was not ready. Jesus called her by name and came to her anyway. The disciples were not ready. Jesus appeared to them in the locked room where they hid in fear. Even unready hearts can be transformed by Christ's love!

23 years ago, in April of 1995, Edye Smith lost her two small sons, Chase and Colton, in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, two men with a deep hatred in their hearts, set off a truck bomb that destroyed the front half of the federal building, including a day care center, and killed 169 people. Edye and her mother, Cathy Wilburn, were devastated by the loss of Chase and Colton. But hatred, grief, and suffering did not have the last word in this family's story.

At the trial for Terry Nichols, which Edye and Cathy attended every day, Cathy noticed that Terry Nichols' mother and sister were alone in the courtroom, bearing the brunt of hatred from the victims and the public. As a Christian, as one who had heard Jesus call her name, Cathy knew what she had to do. Cathy befriended Terry Nichols' mother and sister. In fact, she opened her home to them, offering hospitality to two women she could easily have hated.

Such love, such forgiveness and grace ***IS*** possible in the world. This kind of transformational healing is possible because of what God has done in Christ. Easter says that Christ has forgiven our sins -- not because we deserve it, but simply out of Jesus' great love for us! On this Easter Day, these many years later, the same risen Jesus calls each of us and speaks our names and invites us to please open our hands and our hearts that he might dwell within us. When our hands and hearts have opened wide to behold the Living Christ, then, like Mary, we will be given the commission to "go and tell." Tell all that you meet that

you have seen the Lord. Jesus is alive! Thanks be to God! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!
Amen.

Please stand in body or in spirit, that we may affirm our faith together.

**Affirmation from 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 and Colossians 1:15-20
(No. 888)**

Leader:

This is the good news
which we have received,
in which we stand,
and by which we are saved:

People:

Christ died for our sins,
was buried,
was raised on the third day,
and appeared first to the women,
then to Peter and the Twelve,
and then to many faithful witnesses.

We believe Jesus is the Christ,
the Anointed One of God,
the firstborn of all creation,
the firstborn from the dead,
in whom all things hold together,
in whom the fullness of God
was pleased to dwell
by the power of the Spirit.
Christ is the head of the body, the church,
and by the blood of the cross
reconciles all things to God. Amen.

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