



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for April 4, 2021
"In His Steps: The Resurrection"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: John 20:10-18

Christ Defeated. . . Death

We have emerged now from Good Friday to the grand day of Easter. On Good Friday, the message was Christ has died. On Easter the message is Christ is risen. We have waited for this day and the news it brings.

On June 18, 1815, the combined forces of Austria, Russia, Great Britain, and Prussia under the leadership of British General Arthur Wellington, engaged the army of the French Empire under Napoleon Bonaparte, just outside the Belgium town of Waterloo. It was prearranged that the British were to communicate the outcome of the battle across the English Channel through a series of smoke signals. They did just that. The first word was "*Wellington*" and the second, "*Defeated.*" Immediately, clouds moved in and the message stood through the night.

The next morning a different message came through. "*Wellington Defected. . . Bonaparte.*"

Our message today is this, "*Christ Defeated. . . Death.*" Christ was not defeated, death was. Glory be to God. Let's hear about that was we read this morning of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Lord. We read today from John 20:11-18.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

A Day of Great Rejoicing

We finally made it. We have made it to the grand day of Easter and what a day it is. It is a day of great rejoicing. We have every reason to celebrate. Jesus is risen and with that we have all hope for this life and the next. Praise be to God.

Overwhelmed by Grief

John records it this way. *“Early on the first day of the week while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.”* (John 20:1)

It was early in the morning while it was still dark, not unlike the way it was this morning when we began our Sunrise Service. As Mary made her way through the darkness, she neither saw nor understood. Soon every bit of that would change.

As you might image Mary was overwhelmed with grief. Can you blame her? Jesus had meant everything to her. He had totally turned her life around. The demons that had possessed her no longer had sway. Mary lived life to the full, that is, until that fateful day that Jesus died on the cross. There is no getting around it, Mary was overwhelmed with grief, so much so that she couldn't see straight.

In spite of her grief, Mary was drawn to the tomb as if that would somehow help her aching heart. A few years ago, I was conducting a funeral at Resthaven Cemetery when I saw out of the corner of my eye a lady from the church I was serving, standing some distance away in front of her husband's grave.

Afterward the service I went over to talk with her to see if she was okay. To my surprise I learned that she visited her husband's grave just about every day. *“I tell Joe how upset I am with him for leaving me.”* Everybody grieves differently.

Mary stood outside Christ's tomb weeping. Again, everyone grieves differently. I have known those in their grief who weep incessantly, and other who never shed a tear. Regardless, Jesus stands to meet us in our grief and see us through.

A Surprising Revelation

Mary's grief was interrupted by a surprising turn of events. The stone covering the entrance to Christ's tomb had been removed. Immediately she went and to told Peter and John that the tomb was empty.

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,” she said, *“and we don't know where they have put him!”*

Peter and John couldn't get there fast enough to see for themselves. John was the first to get there, but Peter was the first to look in. It was there that he found the burial cloths, but no Jesus. Eventually, the two left, leaving Mary at the tomb.

The scripture records that Mary stood outside the tomb crying. Wailing was more like it.

Standing Outside the Tomb

Most recently, there have been a lot of tears shed around here. This community has grieved greatly over the past few months. The untimely deaths of Grant Tucker and Jacob Stover have affected us all. We pray for ourselves and for their families.

The losses all of us have sustained during the pandemic have not been easy. Well over a half a million people have died in the United States due to COVID-19. There have been a lot of other losses as well. Dreams have been dashed, jobs lost, and relationships torn asunder. In a way, all of us have stood outside a tomb, if you will, weeping and, if not upon the death of a loved one, then because of some other circumstance.

- It might be that family has you down.
- It might be that you are particularly frustrated at work.
- You might even be looking for work.
- You might have just heard that you or a loved one is seriously ill.
- It might be that the rigors of the pandemic have simply gotten on top of you.

Take heart, there is hope. If Jesus conquered the grave, then he can help you conquer whatever it is you are facing. Paul writes in Romans 8:37-39, *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Called by Name

In time, Mary poked her head into the tomb, only to find a couple of angels seated where Christ's body had been. *“Why are you crying?”* they asked her. They asked in such a way as if to say, *“You know Mary, you really don't have any reason to be crying.”*

Upon that she turned and found herself face to face with the risen Christ, who asked the very same question, *“Woman, why are you crying?”*

At first, Mary didn't recognize Jesus. The darkness might have had something to do with that. Her tears might have as well. Her grief though was probably the biggest factor. Grief has a way of blinding us to the things we need to see.

Jesus cut through her grief by calling Mary by name. It was then that she recognized Jesus for who he was, the Resurrected Lord. There is something about being called by name. At once, we realize that whoever calls us by name knows us and takes an interest in us.

Immediately, Mary knew who Jesus was and that he was there for her. Upon hearing Christ call her name she was given a new hope upon hearing her name. You will never experience the risen Savior if you fail to hear him calling you by name. In fact, if your focus is on what weighs you down you will probably miss him and what he has to offer.

Jesus is calling you by name. Do you hear him? Do you hear him, just now on this beautiful Easter Sunday morning? Jesus is speaking. He wants you to turn his way, to listen to what he wants to say, and experience the difference his resurrection can make for your life.

I Have Seen the Lord

Mary then goes and shares the five greatest words ever spoken, *“I have seen the Lord.”* They ring through the ages giving hope to all who hear them and believe.

Besides Mary, others also saw.

- Peter and John did.
- Thomas did.
- So did the rest of the disciples.
- The two on their way to Emmaus did.

Paul records in I Corinthians 15:5-7 that Jesus *“appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me, as to one untimely born.”*

Christ’s appearance turned Paul’s life around and he was never the same again. Paul would go on to become the greatest evangelist the world has ever known.

The thing with all those who saw for themselves is that they just didn’t know about the resurrection; they experienced the resurrection and because of that their sorrow turned to joy.

And so, we are left to see as well. To look for the resurrected Lord in our own lives. It comes to us to see with the eyes of faith. Unlike Thomas, we are not able to place our hands in the nail prints of Christ’s crucifixion. We are though able to stand in the blessed place of faith that opens us the truth that *“Christ is risen!*

Jesus himself says in John 20:29, *“Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.”* That passage has heartened me for years. It assures me that a lively, growing faith puts me at a blessed spot every time.

Paul puts it this way in II Corinthians 5:7 we are to *“live by faith, not by sight,”* and by so doing, we will be truly blessed. It comes to us to believe, and in our believing, to live as if Jesus is risen from the dead.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, once spent three days in a deep depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed as if she was going to a funeral.

“Who’s dead?” he asked her. *“God,”* she replied.

“What do you mean, God?” Luther said. *“God can’t die.”*

“Well,” she replied, *“by the way you have been acting I was just sure he had.”*

What difference is the resurrection making in your life? Hear this. The most convincing proof of Christ’s resurrection is the transformation of those who know him and believe in him. So then, let’s live as if Christ is risen.

- Let’s live with hope for this life and the next.
- Let’s live with courage in that Jesus has conquered the grave.
- Let’s live rejoicing in the fact that Jesus is Lord over both life and death.
- Let’s live in the presence of the living Christ who calls us by name and seeks to turn our sorrow into joy.