

Easter C
John 20:1-18
April 20, 2025

“Experiencing Resurrection”
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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.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look 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, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus 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.’”¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

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It’s good to be with you on this resurrection Sunday. In fact, it’s always good to be in church on Easter. That said, it’s also always good when the preacher doesn’t go too long because we don’t want to be late for lunch afterward! When Ernie’s family went to church on Easter, the preacher went on too long. By the time they sat down to lunch at grandma’s house, Ernie tucked into his dinner as soon as the plate was set in front of him. ‘Ernie, wait until we say grace,’ demanded his father. ‘I don’t have to,’ the five-year-old replied. ‘Of course you do, Ernest,’ his mother insisted rather forcefully. ‘We always say a prayer before eating at our house.’ ‘That’s at our house,’ Ernie explained, ‘but this is Grandma’s house, and she knows how to cook.’¹

This morning, I’d like to begin my time-conscious sermon by breaking one of the cardinal rules of good preaching—I’m going to begin with a question: How might you have responded to the scene John describes of that first resurrection morn?

Imagine you’re one of those two disciples. It’s dark outside, early morning. It had been an emotionally and physically exhausting week and you’re sleeping soundly in your bed. Then you hear a frantic knock on your door. “Who could it be?” you wonder, “And why are they waking me?!” Then, a thought crosses your mind, “Maybe the Romans have found me...maybe I’ll suffer the same fate my teacher did!” Cautiously,

¹ “Prayer for Easter,” Funny-Jokes.com: <https://www.funny-jokes.com/easter-jokes.htm>.

you go to the door. You don't open it. "Who is it?" you call through the heavy wood. "It's me, Mary Magdalene," comes the response. Relieved, you slide back the latch and you're face to face with a fellow disciple of Jesus—Mary. Mary had been there with Jesus as he died on Friday when you had hidden in fear. Mary was there when they took his body down from the cross while you cowered at a distance. Mary was here now with news, someone's rolled away the stone at the mouth of his tomb.

You're running now, but you're not sure why. Maybe you can still catch whoever did this. Maybe you're just hoping to be there for Jesus, even in death, when you hadn't stood with him just days ago when he needed you most. You sprint down the cobble streets, into the garden, and to the tomb. Panic sets in. "She was right," you think. "Who would do this? Did they take Jesus?" You peak into the dark tomb. He's not there. Wait...the linen wrappings are there and the cloth that had covered his face, it's rolled up on the slab, but he's not here.

Imagine how you might respond to this scene. How might you feel? What might you believe had happened?

According to John's version of the Easter story, the disciple Jesus loved saw the grave clothes and the empty tomb and simply *believed*. Peter, on the other hand, saw the grave clothes and the empty tomb and the author doesn't tell us what he thought—whether or not he believed. For all we know, he left that place a skeptic. And then there was Mary. Mary wept and then heard the resurrected one call her by name and left the place with a heart full of love and the proclamation of good news on her lips. Mary experienced the resurrected one for herself. Her sadness turned to joy, her disappointment to gladness, her trepidation to boldness and she left that place to become the first witness, the first messenger of the resurrection, because she had experienced resurrection for herself.

The truth is, I'm not sure the resurrection is something we *need* to believe in, so much as it is something we *need* to experience. One doesn't have to look far beyond these church walls to see circumstances, institutions,

and individuals in need of an experience of resurrection. In fact, no matter how sheltered we are, as human beings we've all experienced disappointment, sadness, and trepidation. Most of us have experienced hardship, pain, want, and death. And into each of those experiences, resurrection enters, demanding the final word. Into disappointment, sadness, and trepidation resurrection speaks joy, gladness, and boldness. Into hardship, pain, want, and death resurrection speaks comfort, happiness, plenty, and new life. Resurrection is not so much something to be believed in as it is something to be experienced.

I think Mary Magdalene got that. She experienced resurrection and then she went forth from that garden to share her experience with others. We too are invited to experience resurrection and then to go forth and share our experience with others—to speak joy, gladness, and boldness; comfort, happiness, plenty, and new life into all the places of death in our world. Resurrection demands the final word and it is our eyes and ears that will notice where and to whom it is needed, our mouths that will proclaim it, and our hands that work to make resurrection, new life, a reality for all and for our world. May we too be messengers of resurrection, in word and in deed. Amen.