

**John 20:1-18 (Mary and the Resurrected Jesus)**

20 Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

<sup>2</sup> She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him."

<sup>3</sup> Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. <sup>4</sup> They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. <sup>5</sup> Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in.

<sup>6</sup> Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. <sup>7</sup> He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

<sup>11</sup> Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. <sup>13</sup> The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." <sup>14</sup> As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

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

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means *Teacher*).

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

## 2026 – St. Andrew’s Easter 4-5-2026

Today we celebrate that first Easter morning. Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed!  
Alleluia!

During the children’s message I was grateful to share with you the paintings from the Jesus MAFA project<sup>1</sup>, to remind us of all that happened in the life of Jesus from Palm Sunday, through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and now the joy of Easter Sunday. The paintings are also an acknowledgment that the events of Holy Week occurred in a place and time very different from our own.

Surprisingly, perhaps, our Gospel lesson doesn’t begin with joy. Instead it begins with grief.

Have you heard of the term sunshower? It describes what I think of as a very Northwest occurrence, the experience of needing to put your sunglasses on while it is raining. A sunshower is that weather phenomena when it is both rainy and sunny at the same time. If we consider a sunshower as a metaphor, and place emotions on a weather-continuum from stormy to sunny, then grief is in the unpredictable rainy zone, and joy is probably found in the sunshine zone, though I do know folks who are happier in the rain than the sun. I think today’s gospel reading is like a sunshower—there is joy and there is grief. Sometimes all at once, or in very close proximity to each other.

Our passage begins in darkness, early in the morning before the sun rose. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone in John’s gospel, the body has already been anointed for burial, so she doesn’t go there to do something. I think she goes to be there- to be with Jesus in his death. We do that, too. We visit cemeteries or to other places to honor and remember our loved ones who have died. She goes to grieve, and to mourn. But what she finds unnerves her. She finds the stone rolled away from the tomb.

Have you ever returned home late at night, gotten your key out of your pocket, reached to unlock the door and found it already opened? If you know there should not be anyone at home, I’m certain that your heart-rate increased, that you stopped, took a close look at your surroundings, and thought good and hard about what to do next. Alone, in the dark,

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<sup>1</sup>The story, “Colours of Easter” is from Godly Play UK and was used with permission.

<https://www.godlyplay.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Colours-of-Easter-1.pdf>

Jesus MAFA project (<https://jesus-mafa.laciotola.org/>) “French Catholic missionary François Vidil worked with Mafa Christian communities in Cameroon to create an enormous catalogue of paintings depicting the life of Jesus as an African man. The plan was to build a resource that would help Mafa people to teach from the bible in a way that connects with their community.”

with a door that was opened when it should be closed and locked – that's a frightening place to be. What would you do?

Mary sees that opened tomb and her first thought is that someone has taken the body of Jesus. Tomb robbers were an unfortunately common occurrence in those days. So, she runs to find Jesus' disciples to tell them what she suspects.

Once she finds them, Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved run to the tomb in what John records as a kind of foot race. Eventually both disciples enter the tomb and notice that the body is gone but the cloth wrappings are still there.

The gospel of John uses the phrase "the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" to name a particular disciple, undoubtedly known to the community who first read the gospel, but it is not completely clear to us who that is. Over the years, scholars have thought this disciple is the John for whom the gospel is named. More recently the list of possibilities has expanded. One resource I found listed over 16 possibilities<sup>2</sup>. Examples include an imaginary "ideal disciple" that serves as an inspiration for us all, or the historical figures of John, Lazarus, or even Thomas. For simplicity in the sermon, I'll call the 'other disciple whom Jesus loved' John.

Did you notice the detail about the graveclothes of Jesus? That reminds me of another text from John's gospel, where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus came out of the tomb wrapped in his grave clothes and someone had to unwrap him. Here, Jesus' grave clothes were left in the tomb. Care was even taken to fold the cloth that had bound Jesus' head. It was an odd sight. We are told that John saw this and believed – scholars wonder what he believed, but based on the verse that follows,

"<sup>9</sup>They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead"

it appears that what John believed was what Mary Magdalene has said to them, that someone had taken Jesus' body.

It seems a bit anticlimactic, but after Peter and John confirm that Jesus' body is missing, they go back to their homes.

What would you have done? It was a lot to process.

Someone has described the experience of grief as walking in sticky mud through a dense fog. Even the familiar seems different somehow when you are in the fog. Peter and John have just experienced something they can't understand, and maybe their return to their

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<sup>2</sup> See "The beloved disciple" by James Charlesworth, *Theological Studies* 57 (2), 377, 1996.

beds is a way to process it all. Maybe this will make sense in the morning. Maybe then the fog surrounding the missing body will have lifted.

In the next verses we read that “Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying.” The Greek word translated here as “stood” means “standing firm – unmovable”. As the First Nations translation of this text reads, “her heart was on the ground.” An apt description of Mary solidly rooted in one place where she weeps, and mourns.

Eventually, Mary bends over and looks into the tomb. There she sees two angels sitting where Jesus’ body had been placed. They ask her “Woman, why are you crying?” and she tells them her fears, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they’ve put him.” Then, turning around, she saw Jesus – but she didn’t realize that it was him. She thought he was the gardener. When he asks who she is looking for, she again states her fears,

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”

She is there to mourn near the body, and there is no body. Maybe this man knows where the body has been taken. What happens next is surprising –

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabbouni” (which means *Teacher*).

Jesus speaks with her – telling her that he is not like Lazarus, merely given more years to live – but he will be ascending to God his father. Then he says to her:

“Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I’m going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

And we read she runs a second time. This time to spread the good news. As I imagine the scene, Mary Magdalene is running with the tracks of tears still on her face from her earlier weeping. She is in a “sunshower” of grief moving into joy.

“I’ve seen the Lord.” she says. She has seen Jesus and she is proclaiming the good news of Jesus’ resurrection

C.S. Lewis wrote a small book [show] titled “Surprised by Joy<sup>3</sup>.” It is not, as you might expect, a memoir about his marriage to Joy Davidson. It was written before that happy

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, © 1955 currently published by HarperOne.

event, and is instead a recounting of how his own heart turned from the despair of no belief, to the unexpected Joy (with a capital J) that is faith in God.

Mary Magdalene is experiencing unexpected joy that first Easter Morning. And something else. I believe, as Professor Karoline Lewis<sup>4</sup> points out, that this story of Mary Madgalene can be read as her call story, the account of how she affirms her faith in Jesus and is sent out to spread the good news.

In the gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself in many ways. One is as the Good Shepherd, where in chapter 10, he proclaims that his sheep know the sound of his voice, and when he calls them, they follow him. Here in Chapter 20, Jesus calls Mary by simply calling her name. She recognizes the sound of his voice, and responds with “Rabbouni”, which is the more intimate possessive form of the word teacher. My beloved teacher, may be a good translation. In this single word she affirms her discipleship.

Then, when she wants to stay with Jesus – he sends her out. Mary Magdalene is sent out to proclaim the good news of Jesus’ resurrection to all Jesus’ other disciples. The word for sent out is the same root as the word for the one sent out: an apostle.

To be an apostle is to be someone who is sent out to share a message - in this case sent out by Jesus to share the good news of his resurrection.

Mary was sent by Jesus, bringing the good news of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples. The early church gave her the title, “the apostle to the apostles” because she was the first to share that great good news.

And so, our gospel story ends on a positive note – Jesus is risen – and has appeared to Mary Magdalene.

But nothing else about the political climate, the circumstances that led to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion – none of that has changed. In our text for next week, we will find the disciples behind a locked door, afraid of also being arrested.

But something has changed deep inside Mary and, soon, also, within the other disciples.

Jesus’ resurrection is the exclamation point on all that Jesus has done, the miracles, the healings; and all the teaching he has given them. If this is true – and it is! If Jesus is Risen, then it is all true. The love of God wins!

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<sup>4</sup> Karoline Lewis in Working Preacher commentary on John 20:1-18  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/vigil-of-easter/commentary-on-john-201-18-7>

As Paul proclaims in Romans 8,

<sup>34</sup>It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us

<sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the good news of Easter,

- the Great good news of God's unconditional love for us,
- God's forgiveness of us,
- God's new life freely offered for us,
- God's affirmation of us as God's beloved children,
- God's promise that this life is not all there is – but beyond this life is joy immeasurable.

All this is true. All this is gift. All this is grace.

As we move now toward our celebration of communion together. I invite you to reflect upon the many ways Joy (with a capital "J") has surprised you, challenged you, or encouraged you.

And may each sunshower be a reminder for you that the joy of the great Good news of the love of God, so vividly shown to us on Easter, shines like sunshine in the rain.

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed. Alleluia. Amen.