

Weekend of Sunday, April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A
First Reading: Acts 10:34-43
Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4
Gospel Reading: John 20:1-18
Sermon Title: “We are Resurrection People”

Theme

John’s gospel describes the confusion and excitement of the first Easter: the stone is moved, disciples race back and forth, and angels speak to a weeping woman. Then, Jesus himself appears.

Text

¹Early 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). 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.

Sermon

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Happy Resurrection Day to you all. Oh, how I miss you! You know, preaching is not all I do, but it's an important and visible part of what I do, and while we are all doing the best we can, I really miss seeing your smiling faces on Easter Sunday morning. I miss telling you the good news that *Christ is Risen Alleluia!* See? I shout it out and nothing

What you don't know is that we had to video Holy Thursday and Good Friday services on Tuesday evening, and this Easter Service on Good Friday morning for you to get them in your homes on time. So, this has really been a confusing Holy Week for me. I hope my confusion is transparent for you and you feel all the joy of Easter that the Lord intends for us to feel.

Say, speaking of confusing, there was a lot of confusion in the Gospel Reading for today wasn't there? All four of the Gospel Easter stories are slightly different. That is not the confusion I am talking about. I'm talking about the confusion that happened as a result of Jesus' missing body. I wonder if this story gives Don Lepore shivers? I mean, a body is missing!

On Good Friday you heard the Passion according to the Gospel of John, and at the end of that reading, Nicodemus, yes, that Nicodemus, the one who snuck out under the cover of darkness to interrogate the Lord Jesus, and Joseph of Arimathea hastily prepared and buried the body of Jesus. John doesn't mention rolling a stone in front of the opening of the tomb, but Matthew and Mark do. And then since it was the Day of Preparation, that is to say, Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath, they went home.

I don't know about for you, but Saturday of Holy Week is often a strange day for me. Holy Thursday and Good Friday are so heavy and full of grief for me. Then comes Saturday, and it wouldn't matter if it was a perfect day to say, mow the lawn or go fishing, I just can't do it. Now for the last seven Holy Saturday's I have been here at Zion and since we have a Saturday service at which we celebrate Easter, I have to get out of my funk early.

For good God-fearing Jews, nothing could happen on Saturday, the Sabbath day, so it was Sunday before anyone could really finish up the details at the tomb of Jesus. And who was the first to show up at the tomb, and the one who deserves best-supporting role in John's drama of the Easter story, but Mary Magdalene.

Now many of you probably think you know something about Mary Magdalene, but it does not all come from scripture. Some of what you think you know about her comes from popular innuendo. Some have said she was, or portrayed her as, a prostitute, or a person suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, even the secret wife of Jesus!

Who was she? What do we really know? I am so glad you asked. From the New Testament, we can only conclude that Mary of Magdala (her hometown, a village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee) was a leading figure among Jesus' disciples, both the 12 and others who were attracted to Jesus, his message and example.

When the men in that company abandoned him at the hour of mortal danger, Mary of Magdala was one of the women who stayed with him, even to the bitter end. Then, according to John's Gospel, she was the first to witness the open and empty tomb, the first to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection, and the first to preach the "Good News" of that miracle. But I am getting ahead of myself. Back to early Sunday morning.

Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb and at first glance, which is probably all she gave it, the only conclusion she could draw was that Jesus' body had been stolen. Seriously, what other conclusion could she have come up with? Don't you ever just gotten up and walked away? Let me answer that. No! That kind of thing does not happen, even today.

She ran back to report what she had concluded to the others, and Peter and John (the one everyone thinks is the one who John himself, named "the one whom Jesus loved") ran to the tomb to see for themselves. They had to see it with their own eyes, and when they reached the tomb, John wrote that though they both went in and saw the wrappings and the tomb empty of the body of Jesus, John believed even though neither of them understood. Now, if Don lost a body, I would hope he would get to work on finding it. Peter and John "returned to their home"

Mary, despondent Mary, stayed behind and in her despair became the first one to encounter the risen Jesus, but in her anguish, confused him for the gardener. It's a beautiful story of our compassionate Jesus gently revealing himself to her and giving her instructions to go tell the others, which led to her becoming the first evangelist for the Risen Jesus Christ. Upon finding the cowering and confused men back in Jerusalem she proclaimed, "I have seen the Lord!" And this is where I would like to spend the rest of my time with you this Easter.

Speaking only for myself, I've found that over the last month, especially since the "stay at home order" was issued, that I have become mopey, and depressed, and disheartened. I may be over-exaggerating, but I've sort of felt like I was in a tomb myself. Part of that is probably because I have set up a home office in my basement where it is cold and there is no natural light, but back on point, I found myself really looking forward to this Easter because I need some Resurrection! Amen? Maybe you feel the same way. And now that Easter has come, we can take some joy in knowing that, at least intellectually.

But there are no Easter egg hunts, no Easter finery here in the Sanctuary, and no family Easter dinners. To be honest with you, Joan and the other musicians recorded their music last Tuesday afternoon! Once again, it's just Erik and me in the Sanctuary. Happy Easter on a snowy Good Friday morning Erik!

So brothers and sisters in Christ, allow me to clear up some confusion for you and remind you and myself that we ARE Resurrection People! We were last week, and three weeks ago, and all believers have been for 2000 plus years! Since Mary Magdalene figured out the true identity of the mysterious figure in the Garden and reported to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!," they and we and all believers in between have been and are "Resurrection People!"

Yes, the whole world is suffering a bit by being asked to stay in and away from others. A relative few have actually caught the disease. And relatively very few have died – I don't want to minimize the pain and suffering and loss that some have experienced - but keeping it in perspective, we should never lose sight of the joy that is celebrated on Easter – even though we cannot celebrate it together. That doesn't make it any less true. We are Resurrection People!

So, allow me to encourage you to adopt this “Resurrection People” identity now. It may take some effort on your part. We got to get out of the tomb of our minds, and celebrate that Christ is risen! And because he lives, the firstborn of the dead, we who believe in him and call him Lord of our lives will live too – because we are Resurrection People!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer

God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for he is alive and has become the Lord of life, and we, his Resurrection People. Increase in our minds and hearts the resurrection life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.