

## Resurrection of the Lord (Year C)

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*John 20:1-18*

*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. So 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.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and 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. They 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.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). 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."'* 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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Many of you in this room know that my favorite poet is Mary Oliver. My beloved Mary died 94 days ago at the age of 83. She is now in heaven writing poems that I can't wait to read and to wrap around me like a warm blanket. I was first introduced to her in seminary when my preaching professor, Anna, gifted us with her wisdom. Mary Oliver gave three simple instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.

Today, we pay attention to the story of another woman named Mary, who stood outside the tomb weeping. She was weeping the bitter tears of a person overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world. The kind of tears that sting and leave you emptied of all hope. Perhaps you've cried those tears, too. She wept the tears that we've all cried when there just seems to be no justice. The tears she cried were the tears of refugees being turned away at our southern border. The tears she cried were the tears of parents mourning their child's overdose. The tears she cried were the tears of the students who survived the shooting at Columbine High School 20 years ago this week. The tears she cried were the tears of a mother that has to choose between

feeding herself or buying sinfully overpriced insulin for her diabetic child. Tears of hopelessness. Tears of despair. Tears of gut-wrenching agony.

That is how our Easter story begins. Not in alleluia, but in agony. Just a few days ago, we gathered in this sanctuary to remember the depth of Christ's suffering. We did this to remind ourselves that we do not worship a God who sits at a comfortable distance from our suffering. Rather, we worship a God who suffers as one of us and died for all of us. But those seeds of agony have sprouted shoots of joy this morning as we journey with Mary to that empty tomb.

As the tears flowed from the deep river of her grief, Mary heard a twig snap and swirled around to see a face that felt both foreign and familiar. She couldn't quite place it. Grief does that. It makes what could be clear both clouded and cloaked. As the tears blurred her vision she came to the only sensible conclusion she could: it must be the gardener.

She implored him to tell her what he knew. But his news was greater than she could ever imagine.

Then this "gardener" said one word: her name. But he said it in a way that opened her eyes. It makes sense when you think about it. Your name has been called so many times in your life by more people that you probably can count. But when someone you love, someone who *really* loves *you*, calls you by your name, it's holy. I'm willing to bet that the number of people who can have a whole conversation with you by simply uttering your name is a pretty short list.

Jesus, the text tells us, was on Mary's list. He calls her by name and the inexplicable truth becomes clear to Mary. Jesus is not dead. He lives. That is the story we are called to pay attention to.

Now, if we are to follow Mary Oliver's instructions, once we have paid attention to something it is then time to be astonished by it. If the resurrection isn't astonishing then, well, what is? Today is not a day to get lost in a conversation about *how* the resurrection happened. Today is not a day for explanation; it is a day for proclamation and jubilation. Now, I mean no offense to the academics among us. But today, I do not stand before you as a professor. I stand before you as a preacher following the footsteps of the *first* Christian preacher, a woman named Mary Magdalene.

Some things are just so beautiful and so transformational that it's almost a crime to "explain it away." I'm not here today to tell you how the resurrection happened other than to tell you that it tells me that God's love is the single most powerful force in all of creation. I can't tell you how the resurrection happened but I can show you where I see it in the world around us.

When I see people rally to raise money to rebuild the structures of the three black congregations that were victims of arson in Louisiana, I'm astonished by the resurrection.

When a restaurant called Spark Cafe opens in Versailles that only asks its customers to pay what they can, if anything at all, I'm astonished by the resurrection.

When in our fellowship hall a few months ago, a woman shared with us her journey to overcome her heroine addiction, I'm astonished by the resurrection.

When, after the horrific Mosque shootings in New Zealand, leaders of many faiths attended worship at a local Lexington mosque to show our support for our Muslim friends, I'm astonished by the resurrection.

When I see this congregation come together to feed well over a hundred people last week for our Easter egg hunt, bringing together a diverse crowd of young and old, black, white, Latino/a, Asian American, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender friends, I'm astonished by the resurrection.

All of these stories tell us the truth of the resurrection: that love will not be quelled by the forces of evil. That the voices who cry out for justice in the world *will* be heard. That there will be a day when death has died and tears will be wiped from every eye. That there is no wall so great as to separate us from each other. These are the truths of the resurrection. These are the astonishments that will not be silenced by anything.

And now, Mary Oliver brings us to our next task. We've paid attention to the beauty of the resurrection. We've stood in astonishment of the power that was unleashed on that first Easter morn. Now, it's our turn to tell folks about it.

You don't need a seminary degree like me to tell folks about it. You don't need to know biblical Greek or Hebrew. You don't need have to be a man. You don't have to be white. You don't have to be cis-gender or straight. You don't have to be documented. You don't even have to be Presbyterian. All you need, to start with, is five words spoken by a middle eastern woman: I have seen the Lord.

You will leave today equipped with those powerful five words, spoken by a woman named Mary, five words without which we would have no Christianity. Without those five words, we would not be here this morning celebrating the triumph of life over death. Without those five words, we would not have the hope to sustain us to go out in to the world and do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.

You have the capacity of preaching this five word sermon. Preach it in your life. Preach it in your families. Live its truth by refusing to let the forces that seek to tear us apart win.

When you think that racism and white supremacy have won, say to yourself and to others, **I have seen the Lord.**

When you see injustice in the world, when you see people cry out in the pain of Good Friday, say to yourself and others, **I have seen the Lord.**

When you think your brokenness excludes you from God's love and the love of others, say to yourself and others, **I have seen the Lord.**

When we say these words, when we remind ourselves of this prophetic sermon from Mary Magdalene, it changes lives. *That's* the work we seek to do here at Beaumont Presbyterian Church. *That's* the work we invite you to join us in doing here and elsewhere!

You see, I don't think y'all came here today to satisfy some nostalgic obligation. I think you came here today because you're looking for a little life amid the chaos, amid the grief, amid the cruelty of this world. So take a little life home with you today. Take it home and share the life that is found in this five-word sermon.

We have seen the Lord!

That truth, that five-word sermon, will not be contained. We will pay attention to it. We will be astonished by it. And we will tell about it.

Friends, Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Amen.