

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb, ¹² 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. ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir,^[b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[c] "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not touch 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.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: John 20:1-10

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. ² 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." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

“An Easter World”

“While it was still dark” ... *“While it was still dark”* ... With these words, the apostle John, who loved symbolism and double meanings, was likely describing more than the time of day that Mary came to the tomb on that first Easter morning ... before dawn, before the sun had come up, when the light was dim. He was also referring to Mary’s perspective of the world at that moment. It was just as violent, cruel and hopeless as it had been before she’d met Jesus.

Just imagine, Mary, blinking back tears, as she journeyed to the tomb. She must have been thinking of the previous week. How horrible it had been. Not long after Jesus rode into Jerusalem, things had fallen apart. Judas had betrayed him, and Peter denied him. And then, all those people who’d earlier sung, “Hosanna”, got caught up in the bloodlust and the political power struggle and started shouting, “crucify him”. Mary saw Jesus, the One to whom she owed her life, suffer and die. She’d witnessed his last breath and then watched his disciples desert him. Mary thought... *“It is now as it was before.”* A very dark morning indeed.

And when Mary arrived at the tomb’s garden, it became even darker. The giant stone which had been put in front of the tomb had been rolled away. Was it not enough that they had killed him, humiliated him? Now, Jesus’ body must have been stolen and discarded somewhere, alone and further disrespected. His body was all she had left! Mary returned to get Peter and John, who ran to the tomb, affirmed that it was empty but ended up leaving. Mary remained, standing outside the tomb, weeping, crying enormous tears of unspeakable sadness, and loss. She was trapped in a Good Friday world, a world, defined only by darkness, gloom and... doom.

It’s easy for us to look around and feel the same, isn’t it? In fact, during the time I was writing this sermon, the news reports coming to my phone regarded: ...the worrisome and deteriorating tensions between the US and China, Russian forces going out of their way to steal priceless Ukrainian art, the number of tornados up by a factor of 2 due to climate change, children alleged abused by church leaders, pushback against activists protesting loosening of gun regulations , Israel retaliating with air strikes in the Gaza strip ... Ah yes, the weight of the world’s troubles, the weight of its sin, its greed, its cruelty, violence and pervasive disregard for life, suffocating us, making us feel weak and fragile and powerless like Mary. Presbyterian

author, Anne Lamott, observes that we feel “*cursed, cut down, scared to death. . . . as if we’re all waiting for biopsy results for someone we love,*”¹

At some point, Mary too bent down to look inside the tomb. She saw two angels in white, sitting where Jesus’ body had been laid. But, as Rev. Gennifer Brooks surmises, “*They brought her no comfort for Mary had become adjusted to being in the dark, and she could not see them as angels.*”² In a Good Friday world, you see, you don’t see the light. You only see the darkness of pain, sorrow and grief...so thick, so pervasive, so constant.³ You don’t feel comfort only threat, not kindness just suspicion, and not trust but fear and anger. You aren’t free to do anything but survive. “*Woman, why are you weeping?*” the angels asked her.

Brothers and sisters, what about us? Is the bad news around us, the sin, the sadness, the darkness blinding us to the Light in our midst? Are we becoming numb? Are we suspicious of everyone and everything, never able to let go of our cynicism and our assumptions for the worst? Are our tears keeping us from seeing goodness and a way forward? Maybe our vision of the world is a Good Friday one. Maybe. *They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.*”

The story goes that Mary suddenly became aware of someone else standing in her midst. Suspicious he was a thief, she said to him, “*Sir, if you have carried him away, just tell me where he is and I will go and get him.*” Her resignation and urge to just salvage what she could and get back to surviving in her dark world is familiar and heartbreaking, isn’t it?

But the man was not a thief. No, No. He was Jesus, resurrected...the risen Lord, the One crucified, dead, really dead, now living! Yes, it was Jesus, brought back to life by God’s awesome power. Quoting Barbara Brown Taylor, “*Resurrection is completely unnatural. It is EXTRAordinary. Jesus was not resuscitated, raised as a spark that is rescued from the ashes, but he was given new life as a whole new fire is kindled out of nothing, the gracious act of the only One who can make life out of dust! What was cold was made warm, what lay still was*

¹ Anne Lamott. Quoted in: Shannon Kirschner. <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2017/041617.html> (accessed 4-5-23).

² Shannon Kirschner.

³ Gennifer Benjamin Brooks. “*Commentary of John 20:1-18*” <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord/commentary-on-john-201-18-15> (accessed 4-5-23).

made to stand, creation occurred all over again."⁴ Resurrection exceeds reason. It is not explainable or provable. It is terrifying, awesome, ferocious,⁵ marvelous, mysterious....and most importantly, it is something that must be "believed to be seen" not "seen to be believed". The resurrection is a REVEALED truth, friends, of a Savior who died but now lives.

And that changes everything. The Resurrection changes it all. Because Jesus lives, because he defeated the power of DEATH, we, who are in solidarity with him, have life with him after we die⁶ and, and, we have a new life here and now in him! Those fearful things which otherwise squeeze the air out of us, which darken our world view, no longer have power. They still exist surely. We live in the "already but not yet" time, but because Jesus has shown us that they do not have the last word, hope is breathed into us to face them.

Jesus wanted Mary to be able to see and trust this claim. So, into her state of grief and resignation, he spoke her name, "*Mary.*" He called her name, and John says "she turned", "she turned", not only physically, but spiritually. She was transformed; her Good Friday world became an Easter World! *Repeat* She may not have understood everything as she gazed upon her living Lord, but she certainly understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior, and he was coming now to begin setting the world right. And what's more she understood that she was free to go and tell, to tell everyone who might listen, changing their world view too. "*I have seen the Lord*"! "*I have seen the Lord*"!, Mary said.

Well, we too, with our vision no longer trapping us in a Good Friday world can act. "We can be the engines of change. With Jesus, we can "serve as doors for people to move from one reality to another".⁷ It's as though Jesus shines HIS morning rays into our darkness saying , "*Come out, there is no tragedy so great that I cannot redeem it; there is no loss so profound that I cannot overcome it, there is no wrongdoing that I cannot forgive, there is no pain so deep that I cannot bear with you. As I bring my kingdom to this world, there isn't a cause, even in a world with terrorists, bombs, refugees, and starving children, that is so big*

⁴Barbara Brown Taylor. "Surviving Crucifixion" <http://www.ministrymatters.com/preach/entry/2559/surviving-crucifixion>(accessed 4-13-17).

⁵ KC Ptomey. Sermon: "Easter" at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN, 10-9-88.

⁶ Alan Lewis. *Between the Cross and the Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Eerdman's; Grand Rapids, MI:2001).

⁷ Jim Wallis. "*While the Men Were in Hiding, Women Delivered the Greatest News that tse World Has Ever Known,*" (Sojourners; Apr 13, 2017), www.soho.net.

*that you and I cannot devote ourselves to conquering.”*⁸

Siblings in Christ, the Lord is now calling our names. (*SLOWLY*) Easter didn't just happen in the garden 2000 years ago. It happens each and every day all around us, whenever new life dawns. Our Savior is loose out there empowering us to first turn from our own Good Friday perspectives and then to share the Easter news with everyone he places in our path. And while this may seem daunting at times, we need remember that we are not Christians in a Good Friday world. No, it's not a Good Friday world any longer. It's an Easter World! It's an Easter World now. As Shannon Kirshner says, "It's a world that belongs only to God...a world God will never abandon...a world pulsing with God's grace and hope...a world God is transforming for all people, for all of creation. So, we should say not just that the Lord *has* risen. Rather, we can say, Christ *is* risen!!!!"⁹ Friends, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Allelujah. Amen.

⁸ Anon.

⁹ Shannon Kirshner.