

Sermon: Easter Sunday, Year A
John 20:1-18
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St. Luke's ~ San Lucas Episcopal Church
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Can you remember a moment when you experienced something unexpected and surprising... something so powerful that it changed something deep within you?

The kind of moment that doesn't come with clear answers,
but leaves you with an undeniable sensation
that something has changed.

The specific moment that changed the way you saw things...
the precise moment that changed the way you saw yourself...
the unique moment that changed what you believed was possible.

In the gospel that we heard today, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early in the morning,
while it is still dark.

And she is looking for Jesus but, why?

She comes carrying grief, she comes carrying love, she comes carrying a memory, carrying
something that she cannot fully explain.

She may come expecting something she can hold on to...
But if you pay attention, she is looking for Jesus among the dead.

And when she sees that the stone has been removed from the tomb, and Jesus' body is not there,
her grief does not go away.
Her sorrow only deepens.

"They have taken my Lord," she says, "and I do not know where they have laid him."

Even when she turns and sees Jesus standing there, she does not recognize him.
She mistakes him for the gardener.

Which is strange, isn't it?

This is someone she knows. Someone she has followed. Someone she loves.
And yet—she cannot see him, she cannot recognize him.

It's interesting, don't you think?

You know, when we are confronted with the possibility of something new, our first instinct is not
hope... but confusion.

Mary is weeping, she is disoriented, she is searching.

Yes, she is searching for Jesus, but she is searching for the version of Jesus she has lost.
The Jesus she understands. The Jesus who belongs to the past.
She is searching for the Jesus she can hold onto.

And if we are honest... we know this instinct so well.

We also want to hold on.
We want to hold on to the way things used to be—
to relationships that once felt secure,
to a sense of certainty in a world that now feels fragile,
to a faith that once felt clear and uncomplicated.

We want to hold on to a version of God that feels familiar... predictable... contained.

Because we are living, even now, in what feels like that same moment Mary experienced—
“early in the morning... while it is still dark.”

A world marked by uncertainty, where the future feels unclear.
A world marked by injustice.
A world marked by longing—
longing for peace, for meaning, for something we can trust.

Yes, we also want to hold on.
We want hope to mean going back...
going back to what we knew,
going back to the life we had.

Back to before the diagnosis.
Back to before the loss.
Back to before everything changed.

We long for a “before”—
before things became uncertain,
before the world felt so divided, so heavy, so complex.

So, we may keep looking in the old places,
in the old paradigms, in the familiar patterns.

So, I wonder... what are you holding onto now?
What are you still carrying, expecting, or trying to keep from the past?

Yes, when we do not find what we expect, we assume something has gone wrong.
We assume God is missing.
We assume hope has been taken away.

“They have taken him.” Mary cries.

You know, when Mary goes to the tomb, she expects death.
But what she finds is something completely different.
She finds something unexpected, surprising, and powerful.

She comes looking for a body... instead, she encounters the living Christ.
Not the Jesus she remembers, but the Jesus who calls her forward.
Not a return to the past, but the beginning of something new.

You know, resurrection happens when we begin to sense that something is changing.

When Jesus calls Mary by her name, this is the precise moment when the resurrection is proclaimed.
No angels have announced that Jesus is risen.
Jesus’ calling Mary by her name is the announcement.

This announcement is made not by telling Mary who Jesus is, but by appealing to who she is.
There is tremendous power in the speaking of her name.

Yes, something has changed dramatically in the life of Mary.
And in that moment, like Mary, we may not yet realize that what feels like loss might actually be the beginning of something entirely new.

And we may struggle to recognize the signs of new life. Right?

Just as quickly as Mary recognizes him,
Jesus says something that feels almost disturbing:

“Do not hold on to me.”

But why?

Because something new is happening.
Everything is new.

And in that newness, Mary receives a new calling—one quite different from holding on to him.

She is sent by him. She is sent by Jesus.

By calling her name, Jesus gives Mary a new and transformative purpose:
“Go and tell my brothers,” he says.
“Go and tell the others.”

And in that unexpected moment, something shifts... and everything changes.

Because resurrection is not about going back.
Resurrection is about being sent forward.

Mary is the first apostle—not because she understands everything,
but because she is willing to go.

“I have seen the Lord,” she says.

But what she has seen is even more than a risen Christ.
She has encountered a new reality,
a new life with God.

And that is the Easter life we are invited into.

A life where we do not hold on to what was,
but trust what God is doing now.

So, I wonder again,
What are you holding onto from the past that may be keeping you from being sent forward
into a new life—into a life full of amazing, transformative possibilities?

Yes—resurrection is not about returning to what was,
it is about stepping into what God is doing now.

And this is good news:

God is not absent.
God is not lost.
God is always here with us.

And more than that—God is still at work.

God is at work whenever someone is called by name, just like Mary.

You know, God’s action in the world and in our lives is transformative.
If we hold on to what we thought we knew, we may completely miss the miracle.

So the good news is that:
God is here.
God is working.
And God is calling us by name right now.

And like Mary, we are not meant to hold onto what was—
but to be sent forward into new life.

We too are sent—
not to hold on to the past,
but to behold the unexpected,
and to walk forward into a new life.

In a few moments, we will share in the sacrament of baptism and renew our baptismal covenant.

In that water, we remember that we have been named, claimed, and made new in Christ.

So may we have the courage to be transformed,
may we have the faith to trust what we cannot yet fully see,
and the grace to live as people who have been called by name and sent forward.

May we release what we are holding from the past,
and step into the new life God is already bringing forth.

And like Mary, may our lives proclaim:
“I have seen the Lord.”

Amen.