

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**A: The Resurrection of Our Lord / Easter Sunday
John 20:1-18**

**9 April 2022
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Peter, John and Mary: Which one are you?”

So when is Easter???

You have probably heard that question most years, and perhaps asked it as well,
because Easter does not fall on the same date every year.

Anyone know how the date is determined?

And since we don't tend to follow the lunar calendar, we generally have to look it up.

But that's the question that I'd like you to keep in the back of your mind
as we look at our gospel story for today.

Our story begins with Mary.

She has just seen the man she loves the most,
the man who has changed her life, the man on whom she had pinned all her hopes,
be betrayed, falsely accused, convicted, sentenced to death, and nailed to a cross to die.

She is experiencing the dark night of the soul, and not being able to sleep,
she stumbles out into the darkness of night, and feeling the overwhelming need to be near Jesus –
even if it is his dead body – she makes her way to the tomb.

At least the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had provided was new
and in the most beautiful garden she'd ever seen.

That gave her some comfort.

She would go there and sit outside the tomb, and pour out her heart to the one she loved.

But when she got there things were not as she had expected. The stone had been rolled away!

All of the sudden her heart was gripped with fear!

What had happened? Had robbers stolen his body? What had they done with it?

Were they still here? Was she in danger?

This was no place for a single woman alone.

If something happened to her, no one even knew she was here.

She backed away, trying not to make a sound until she was outside the gates and on the street
and then she turned and ran back as fast as she could to where she knew Peter and John were staying.

She knocked on the door and there was just silence.

Inside, Peter and John heard the knocking, but they didn't move.

It was still night! Who would be knocking at this hour?

Oh, God, could it be the authorities come to arrest them?!

Fear gripped them.

The knocking continued, but it wasn't a pounding,
it didn't sound like they imagined the authorities would sound!

Peter crept to the door and asked quietly, “Who is there?”

“It is I, Mary of Magdala!” Let me in! Please!”

When she had told them that she had found the tomb opened,
they bombarded her with questions, but she had no answers for them.

She had simply seen that it was lying open and fled.

There was nothing to do but go with her and see what had happened.

John was more eager than he, but they ran, and Mary followed behind.

And here is where the story gets really interesting, because each of the three react differently,
each sees something different, and they respond in different ways.

John gets there first, and peers in, but doesn't enter.

He sees that the wrappings that had been around Jesus' body are there. And that's all he sees.

Peter gets there a few moments later and doesn't hesitate but enters.

He, too, sees the wrappings, but he takes in more of the scene.

Over in the corner he sees the wrapping that had been around Jesus' head, rolled up.

Once Peter is inside, John enters, too, and here's where the story is very unclear.

It says that John "believes". And yet in the very next verse it says,

that neither Peter nor John yet understood that Jesus must rise from the dead.

So I think we're left with 2 possibilities.

Either John believes that, yes, Mary was correct, someone has stolen Jesus' body.

Or else the community of John who wrote down this story

wanted to make sure that their beloved John was given credit for being the first to believe in the resurrection

As far as I'm concerned, John did not believe any more than Peter,

because if either of them had something else would have happened –

and they would not have returned home, leaving Mary behind!

Peter and John looked, but all they saw was an empty tomb.

All they experienced was more confusion and more fear and they simply went back to what they had been doing

Easter had not come for either Peter or John.

But Mary had an entirely different experience.

While Peter and John had done their quick investigation, given up, and gone home, Mary determined to stay.

Like so many of those detective stories that I read,

there are those (usually the bumbling police) who take a cursory look,

make up their mind what's happened, and close the investigation;

while the unlikely detective is sure that there must be more to the story

and doggedly and determinedly presses on for answers until they get them.

Peter and John have investigated the scene, and found nothing of consequence –

but now that they are gone, Mary decides she will have a look for herself.

She looks in – just like they had done – and she sees something entirely different.

She doesn't just see what exists in the physical realm –

the place where Jesus' body once lay –

she sees what exists in the spiritual realm – she sees 2 angels.

Now whether the angels were there and Peter and John couldn't see them,

or whether the angels didn't show up because Peter and John weren't looking

the way Mary was looking, we don't know.

But we do know that Peter and John didn't see angels; and Mary did.

In John's account, they don't give her any information, but simply ask why she is weeping.

She tells them that she is looking for the body of her Lord and turns around.

And then she sees something else that Peter and John didn't see: a man,

a man who asks her the same question: Why are you weeping?

and then another: For whom did you say you are looking?

And when Mary, assuming that this must be the gardener who has moved Jesus for some reason,

answers his question, he simply speaks her name: Mary.

And it's in that moment that Easter happens for Mary.

It's in that moment that she meets the risen Lord.

And so it has been from that time to this.

After his death, Jesus never appeared to the crowds again, but only to those who loved him. Did you realize that?

Jesus only appeared to those who loved him, and to those who were ready to see him.

Peter and John weren't ready that morning, but Mary was.

She was the first to see the risen Lord. That was her Easter. And it completely changed her life.

Her immediate response is to relate to him the same way she had before,
calling him teacher, holding onto his feet, and playing a background role in his ministry.
But Jesus says, no, don't hold onto me. Things are different now.
You may have thought I changed your life before, but that was nothing to what this will do to you!
You have just seen the most amazing miracle of your life!
You have seen me and touched me and you KNOW that I have been raised from the dead,
and now you have a story to tell, and a job to do, and a ministry to perform.
It doesn't matter that women's testimony carries no weight; even that has changed.
Go, and tell my brothers what you have seen and that I will be ascending to God.
And because Easter has happened to Mary, because she has seen the crucified and risen Lord,
because she has spoken to him and he has spoken to her, she cannot keep silent,
but runs to tell the men that she, Mary, has seen the Lord!

So the question before us this day is who are you?
Are you like Peter and John who came to see where Jesus was but found the tomb empty
or are you like Mary who found more than an empty tomb?
Have you only seen the material evidence with your physical eyes
or have you seen into the spiritual realm through the eyes of faith?
Have you only seen the wrappings of a dead Jesus or have you encountered the living Christ?
Have you come seeking Jesus only to go back to what you were doing
or have you come and found Jesus and left to share your excitement and joy?
Are you more like Peter and John or more like Mary?

The truth of the matter is that each and every one of us starts out like Peter and John.
Even if we've heard about Jesus for years and know lots about him,
we can still find ourselves only seeing the "wrappings" of Jesus –
the worship rituals, the theological teachings, the social service activities.
Even if we come to worship and spend time serving those in need
and support our congregation with our time and talent and treasure,
those are still only the "wrappings" of a missing Jesus.
If that's all we see, if that's all we hear, if that's all we experience, then we'll leave the same way we arrived,
and go back to living our lives as we've lived them before.
But if that's all we know, then Easter hasn't happened for us yet.
For Easter happens when we have an experience not like Peter's and John's, but like Mary's.

Easter happens for us when we can look at the situation in front of us
and see not just the "wrappings" of death, but to see a messenger from God
who meets us in our darkness and doubt, our depression and despair,
our anger and anxiety, and in our failure and fear, with the words, "Why are you weeping?"
Easter happens for us when we've been looking in vain for Jesus
and then he shows up in a way we never expected.
Easter happens for us when we hear Jesus speak our name, and we know that finally everything will be okay.
Easter happens for us when the miracle of the risen Jesus changes everything in our lives –
who we know God to be, who we know ourselves to be, what we know our purpose to be.
Easter happens when we can no longer keep the excitement and joy of encountering the risen Lord to ourselves,
but we can't wait to tell everyone we meet that we have seen the risen Lord!

If you are like Mary, then I am so happy for you, because you know the joy and excitement that she felt!
But if you are like Peter & John, that's okay, too, because if you've read ahead in the story,
you know that Easter happens for Peter and John as well.
They, too, encounter the risen Lord, their lives, too, are changed, and they, too, cannot wait to tell the world!

In the end it doesn't matter who you are today. All that matters is that you, too, encounter Jesus.
For that is the reason we are here – not just to parrot the words "Christ is risen"
(as someone else's account) but to be able to say with Mary, "I have seen the Lord!"
Will you pray with me?