

Easter Sunday Sermon  
March 31, 2024

Saint Paul and Saint Luke  
Reverend Martha Harris

Scripture:

Isaiah 25: 6 - 9

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14 - 24

Acts 10: 34-43

Gospel: John 20: 1 - 18

He is Risen!

On this glorious Easter morning, we celebrate the abiding faith of Mary Magdalene who first discovered that Jesus Christ was not in the stone tomb where he was placed after his crucifixion on the cross. Having watched Christ's agonizing slow and painful death on the cross, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb on the first day of the week at sunrise. Concerned about her ability to remove the heavy stone placed in front of the tomb, imagine her surprise when she discovered that the stone had been removed and the tomb empty.

She ran to tell Simon Peter and John, the other disciple, who followed her to the tomb after she told them that the Lord's body is no longer in the tomb.

John reached the tomb first, saw the linens on the ground, but did not enter. Peter followed, and saw the same evidence that Christ's body was no longer in the tomb, but didn't realize that Christ had

risen. John then entered the tomb, saw the evidence and he BELIEVED. Neither John nor Simon Peter understood the scripture that Christ must rise from the dead - so they went home and didn't tell anyone what they had seen.

Mary, meanwhile, remains outside the tomb, weeping when two angels appeared in the tomb and asked her why she was weeping,

As soon as she explained that she was weeping for Christ, a man appeared behind her - a man she didn't recognize. It wasn't until he called her by name, Mary, that she recognized him Rabbouni - she calls out, which means teacher. Jesus told her not to touch him because he had not yet ascended to his Father.

Mary did as Jesus told her and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord" and told them what Jesus had said to her.

Like Mary, we long to be known by God, to be held in God's gaze, to be seen by God as the object of God's desire. When Jesus addresses Mary Magdalene by name, we can imagine her reaction - as if we had first encountered Jesus at the beginning of his resurrection.

John's Gospel is often referred to as a love story about Jesus. The language and symbolism is poignant - especially for someone who never met Jesus.

There may have been times in our own lives when we heard God or Jesus address us by our names. The small still voice within us can cause our hearts to leap with joy - and also comfort us when we are experiencing difficult times.

This is the Easter story in our own lives. Christ lives within each of us. We come together as a community to celebrate the miracle of our faith - all Christians worship as one on Easter morning. Christ's sacrifice on the cross is a uniting force - not a dividing one. We also come to understand that Jesus was not killed by the Jews - he was the victim of an oppressive Roman government who felt threatened by his growing popularity. They called him "King of the Jews" derisively. For too long, Jesus' death on the cross has led to confusion, anger and wars against the Jewish people. As Christians, it is important that we recognize the shared faith tradition among Christians and Jews - we are all descendants of Abraham and Sarah, our faith forebears.

Dr. Serene Jones, prominent public theologian and scholar who serves as President of Union Theological Seminary, writes about this passage:

"Jesus comes to use not as a general idea or an imagined ghostly figure, but as a PRESENCE that reaches beyond our mind's overt powers of knowing and touches our lives in ways we cannot see."

Let's ponder that for a moment -

We SEE God in creation, the sunshine, the flowers that are beginning to bloom in our gardens, and along our sidewalks and flower pots.

And we FEEL the presence of God when we are blessed with His peace that passes all understanding - when suddenly our world shifts into place and has meaning.

That is my Easter wish for each of you. That you will experience God's peace and live with the joy that God loves YOU - all the time and always. Today is the first day of your new life in Christ. Let us all rejoice.

He is Risen! The Lord is Risen today! Alleluia!

And the people say AMEN, Alleluia. Happy Easter!