

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes. <sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> 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.’ ” <sup>18</sup> 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.

**Response to the Word**

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

**ALL: Thanks be to God!**

John 20:1-18

04/05/2026 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

*Easter: Into A New Dawn!*

Pastor Amy Terhune

A United Methodist pastor and colleague of a previous generation tells about a time he was asked to conduct a committal service about 2 hours away from his parish. He rode over with the funeral director, and by the time he arrived, a flu-bug had him feeling as though there was a pogo stick derby going on in his head and stomach. He suffered through the service, but was looking a little worse for wear, so the funeral director suggested he stretch out in the hearse to rest a bit. Now some of you may think that’s a little creepy, but let me tell you—as a clergyperson speaking from experience—hearses lose their creepiness after a half-dozen funerals or so. It’s just a car. So anyway, the pastor did that. The funeral director laid out a couple of yoga pads and a blanket, and my colleague could not

even feel the rollers as he stretched out in the hearse and promptly fell asleep. And he didn't wake up until the vehicle stopped. Taking a few minutes to fully awaken, he slowly sat up, stretched, rubbed his eyes. Now the pastor admits that, sick as he was, he probably looked like death warmed over as he drew aside the curtain on the side window to see where he was. And where he was, was face to face with a gas station attendant filling the tank, who was surprised and shocked to see a body in the back of the hearse sit up and look at him. A scream resounded, the gas pump flew into the air, and the attendant fled into the service station, as the funeral director desperately tried to catch up to explain the situation. [from "The Lighting of The Acolyte" by Linda M. Jump, CSS Publishing Co., Inc., 1987, 0-89536-896-X. Adapted here.] Now there's one gas station attendant who will probably never fill up the gas tank of another hearse as long as he lives.

Now of course, the guy in the back of the hearse wasn't really dead. There's no miracle there. But we pause this morning to let the full impact of this day explode onto our consciousness once again. Two thousand years ago, *before* the first ray of light had touched the sky, a stale and lifeless tomb held the body of a man who was very, very dead. Whipped, beaten, crucified, stabbed. And that's just what did in his body. It doesn't count the blows to his spirit—the betrayal, abandonment, humiliation. Very, very dead.

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. John's account of the resurrection is the only one where Mary comes alone. Both Mark and Luke claim the women were bringing spices to tend the body, but I doubt that's the case here. One person by themselves could never roll back the stone. Mary is likely coming to grieve, to be close to the one she's lost. She comes while it's still dark – a statement about the state of her spirit as well as the time of day.

But she knows something is wrong before she gets close, because the stone has been rolled back from the entrance. It almost makes me tired to read John's account because it is still very, very early in the morning and everyone starts running. Have you noticed that? Mary runs to get Peter, who runs back to the tomb following the disciple who Jesus loved, who is also running. John waits for Peter before he goes in, but Peter doesn't seem to hesitate – I picture him skidding to a stop at the entrance, but that's just conjecture on my part. He sees the empty tomb, the linen wrappings in a pile, the headscarf rolled up in a place by itself. What he makes of it is anyone's guess, for the scripture reports that he saw it all, and then he went home. I mean, it's a bit anticlimactic, don't you think? Maybe he's overwhelmed, doesn't know what to think. Maybe he can't get past his own guilt and culpability. He did deny he knew Jesus not once, but three times! Maybe he thinks somebody stole the body, and he's going to put together a search party. I don't know.

But John, who identifies himself as all of us should – the one who Jesus loves – he sees and believes – that's what the lesson says. Perhaps he realizes something which may not have occurred yet to Mary. Namely, why would somebody stealing a corpse unwrap it first? Remember, Mary thinks someone has stolen the body as an act of cruelty – that even in death he is mocked, disgraced, brutalized. But if that were true – and if someone wanted to dump him in a ditch for crows and vultures – wouldn't they wait until they get where they're going to dump him before unwrapping him? I mean, he's been dead three days! Yuck! Right?

I think John sees those wrappings and he knows that death isn't here anymore. The wrappings fall away as bones are healed, and wounds are sealed, and skin rehydrates, and synapses start firing, and breath returns. If you're alive, wrapping don't stick. Have you ever tried to keep a bandage on without any tape? It might stick to blood and pus but not to healthy skin. Have you ever tried to keep a baby swaddled when he or she is awake? Doesn't work! Jesus got up and everything associated with death falls off. And John sees it. There are no angels, no earthquakes; just emptiness. He hasn't seen the Risen Christ. He may not yet fully grasp resurrection, but that empty tomb bears witness to the fact that Jesus has at least conquered death. John is the first to see what is—and to allow his expectations to be altered because of it.

Mary took a little longer. She doesn't expect him, doesn't recognize him. It's not until she hears his voice say her name that she begins to grasp what might be going on. And then she does what anyone would do when meeting someone they thought they'd never see again—she throws her arms around him. At least, that's my best guess because Jesus says, "Don't hold on to me." Other translations read, "Don't cling to me," which gives us a little clearer picture of Mary's reaction to discovering him alive. She clings to him, celebrates his presence, and maybe thinks to herself: "Now everything will be fine. Now everything is alright again. Now everything will be like it was before."

And to that, Jesus says "no." The resurrection tells us unequivocally that everything will not be like it was before. Resurrection means newness. It means change. It means transformation. It means there's cause for hope.

Have you ever asked yourself why this day is called Easter? Maybe I'm the only one who wants to know these things, but bear with me. Most other languages use a variation of Paschal, meaning Passover, to name this holiday. This references the sacred Hebrew festival that was being celebrated in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified, but also redefines it – as in the Passover from death to life again. A few eastern Slavic nations simply call it "the greatest day" – that's what their terms for Easter mean. I kind of like that! The English and the Germans are the only ones who use Easter, a term that shares its root with the term East, from the Germanic root *ostern* – the direction from which the sun rises. The theology of that is that Easter represents the dawn of a new day, and not just a new day, but a new era.

Yesterday morning, I stopped at McDonald's to pick up breakfast on my way home from Meijer. Apparently, everyone else had the same idea because it was packed. I waited to get to the speaker, place my order, and then merged into one lane to approach the payment window and the pickup window. Pouring rain is pounding on my car, my windshield wipers are swishing back and forth at a furious pace, and despite all that, I hear yelling and honking behind me. It seems that the two people at the two speakers had finished placing their order at the same time, both pulled forward and seemed to think they had the right of way. Thus, one tapped the front bumper of the other enough to leave a small dent, from what I gather, and heated words were exchanged through open windows in the rain. And I thought to myself – without judgement, because I've been there – how do we lose perspective to the point where we'll risk a dent to our vehicle to get our Egg McMuffin 30 seconds faster than the other guy.

As I get older, the single biggest struggle I face personally is the fight against becoming cynical. Watching the news, it's easy to believe that everything is going from bad to worse. Watching two grown adults yell at each other in the drive thru, it's easy to think that we're getting meaner, less patient, more selfish. Grief is real. Fear can be pervasive. Suffering is all around. People are so

divided. But then I remind myself that I serve a group of people who just spent upwards of \$350,000 to refurbish an education wing in this building to help unique kids with special needs who we don't even know have a safe place to be after school. I work every day with folks who welcome all kinds of people, feed all kinds of people, try to help all kinds of people. Regular people working together. And that gives me hope. When the world around me gets dark, I look east for the rising Son. When the world drives me to my knees, the resurrection drives my prayers. When the world drives me to tears, the resurrection drives me to see beyond those tears, to trust the future, to reach out to others. Resurrection is the knowledge that God works in little things and hidden moments and beating hearts, none of which can be seen in glaring spotlight of pop culture today. But something else is breaking in, like the sun breaking over the horizon, and once you sense it, feel it in your bones – the life that sustains our hope takes shape in the world around us.

There aren't pat answers to the questions that keep us up at night. But what I do have is testimony; experience. Mary went to the tomb that first Easter morning having witnessed a tragedy. Her heart was broken. The music had gone out of her soul. But in her heartache, she got what she most needed—God. God showed up, present in the living, breathing person of Jesus Christ. And God is present to us now.

One of the bloggers I've followed for years is an Australian pastor named Susan Grace. She points out that in the southern hemisphere, Easter comes in the autumn, when leaves are falling, and days are getting shorter, and the cold of winter is beginning to settle in. That juxtaposition fascinates me. We pull out our flowers and our spring bonnets and our baby chicks and celebrate new life as spring is blooming around us, but they proclaim resurrection and new life when nature itself seems to say the opposite. She points out that Adam lived and died and we didn't see him again, but Jesus (the new Adam) died and lived and still infuses the earth with his presence, thus reversing Adam's course. She writes, "While our lives are still as constrained by all the limits of this world and we are as vulnerable to ailment, aging, confusion and grief as any, we are initiated into the dawn of the soul, the budding of eternity, the flicker of unquenchable light and hope. We need this experience of dawn, of the rising of the sun, so that we can be reminded of our true origins and our true destination. We need this ritual of lighting the paschal candle... so that we can be reminded of who we are and to whom we belong. We need this sensory reminder of what our souls intuit – that life is unquenchable, that love survives even death, and that hope awaits us and calls us forward. [adapted from <https://www.companionsontheway.com/post/easter-dawn-new-beginnings>.]

The thing is, we'll never get it by studying it. Peter, John, Mary – they all had the same evidence in front of them that first Easter. Peter went home. John believed. Mary saw the Lord. Because in the end, it's not about evidence. It's about experience. She heard his voice, felt his touch, saw his radiance. Peter went home in silence. But Mary waited for the new dawn and went home announcing "I have seen the Lord." So may it be for us.

Beloved, Christ is risen!  
Christ is risen indeed!  
Thanks be to God. Amen.