



AT CALVARY, WE SEEK TO BE A PLACE OF CONNECTION in the midst a fractured world by cultivating a spiritual home for the community, where people can find belonging, and then reach out to serve our community. At whatever level you are seeking connection, we hope you feel at home here.

Whether you're here for the first time or are here each week, we believe it is God who has brought us together today into this time of worship. and so we pray you will find what your soul needs this day.

As we hear the Easter story this day, we remember that:

*We are not eye-witnesses to an event,  
as were Mary and the disciples;  
we have not journeyed  
through a dangerous city  
to seek answers or consolation;  
we have not seen angels  
gathering at the rim of this day,  
or wept in the garden this morning  
because we could not find Him.*

*But we are here to attest to a story  
that has not lost its power  
during twenty centuries  
of change and conflict.*

*We are here because those before us  
carried this story  
as if it were precious gold;  
cherished it as if it were  
the key to a hidden wisdom.*

*Sisters and brothers, siblings in Christ,  
take your places here today  
in celebration and in awe.  
What you are about to hear again,  
has the capacity to change the world.  
Your very presence attests  
to the rising up of life  
from the tomb of despair,  
and to the uncontrollable power of God.*

*It is Easter morning again:  
and we will celebrate.<sup>1</sup>*

## **John 20:1-18**

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

<sup>1</sup> <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/04/an-easter-call-to-worship.html>

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to 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."'* 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.

THE STORY OF EASTER IS ULTIMATELY A REMINDER that even when we think we know how a story is going to end, we're sometimes wrong.

For Jesus' friends and families, they'd seen his death, witnessed his burial. They knew the ending to this story because they had seen it before.

But then Mary arrives, while it is still dark, and finds an empty tomb.

*What are the stories in your life right now that you think you know the ending to?*

Maybe you think the end of a relationship is the end of love. Are you willing to be wrong about that?

Maybe you think that because the problems we are facing in society are so big, they are too much for us to fix, and they will always be dreadful and so why should we even try? *Are you willing to be wrong about that?*

I was adopted as an infant, and back in the 1900s, adoptions were closed. I knew I would never know who my birth parents were. I knew I would never meet any of my birth family, or know who I looked like, or meet the people who were responsible for my somewhat spicy personality.

I knew the ending to that story.

And then in 2014 Washington State passed a law that opened sealed birth records. And while I don't have time to give you all the tea, because I know some of you have brunch reservations, I have met much of my birth family. I know who I look like. I can now see who my children look like on my side of the family, other than me. I was wrong about what I thought was the end of my adoption story.

Whatever story you think you can already see the ending for, Easter is a reminder to pause. To hope. To trust that the unknown future will turn out to be loving.

Are we willing to be wrong if it means we just might see new life? Are we willing to get past our fears to do what God is calling us to do?

And Mary goes to the tomb while it is still dark, when it is hard to see the path around you. In the other gospels, there is a sense that the women have come to the tomb to anoint his body. But Mary doesn't seem to be carrying any spices with her. It may be the dark of night, but she has come to see Jesus. Even though she thinks he's dead.

Jesus cares a lot about seeing and believing in John's Gospel. All throughout the Gospel, characters are told to look around them, to pay attention to what they see, so that they may believe in Jesus. In the beginning of the gospel, as Jesus calls the first disciples, they are invited to "come and see" as they join him on the journey. And once the people see things in John's Gospel, then they believe.

— The guests at the wedding in Cana where Jesus performed the first of his signs,

—Nicodemus, who wondered how to be born again,

—the Samaritan Woman at the Well who wondered at this man who told her everything she'd ever done,

—the man who once was blind but now can see proclaims Jesus as Lord,

—and many of the people who see Jesus call Lazarus out of his tomb see and believe in Jesus.

And it is hard to see clearly in the dark.

This is a familiar gospel story for me, but this year as I was preparing to preach this story, I noticed John mentions that Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark. Not in the brightness of the noonday sun. Not in the muted colors of sunrise or sunset. She went to the tomb while it was still dark.

I think that's important for us today. Because the world feels dark. We're divided. I know political division is not new. But it feels deeper now. And it feels like we're intentionally being divided from each other by a system that benefits from our isolation. *We're walking in the dark.*

We're worried for our troops, who are in harm's way as war is being waged without congressional approval and without a clear objective. *We're walking in the dark.*

We're anxious about the economy with rising prices and global instability. *We're walking in the dark.*

When you're out walking in the dark, even if the path is a familiar one, things look different, sometimes menacing even. Even when you've walked the path in the brightness of daylight, it looks different in the dark.

And I appreciate that Mary didn't wait for the sun to rise before she went looking for Jesus.

And I appreciate that Jesus met her in the dark, and called her by name.

Before she meets Jesus, though, she encounters angels, sitting where his body had been. "Woman, why are you weeping?"

*"They have taken my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him!"* she tells them.

Mary's vision is not quite clear yet in the early morning dark. And though the men have left and gone back for breakfast, Mary is not alone. The angels accompany her in her confusion and grief.

And then she sees Jesus standing there and hears him ask, *"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"*

And even as she supposes him to be the gardener, you wonder if she begins to see and believe as she hears his voice.

Because she saw and heard Jesus call Lazarus out of the tomb.

Because she heard him talk about being the Resurrection and the Life.

Because she saw the signs of water into wine and the feeding of the crowd of thousands.

Because she heard him telling the disciples all about his being glorified and ascending to God the Father.

You wonder if the light is dawning on her, as all of those moments in the past are coming into clearer view. *"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away."*

It is hard to let go of our belief in Death, our belief that we know the ending to the story.

And then Jesus calls her by name.

*Mary.*

And that's what it takes for Mary to turn around, away from an empty tomb, and away from seeing and believing in death, to seeing and believing in LIFE.

Being called by name.

We do not believe in an impersonal God, uninvolved in our lives. We believe in the God who meets us when we've come to the tomb while it is still dark, calls us by name and claims us as God's own.

*Mary.*

She sees him in that moment and, finally, believes.

She returns to the disciples and announces, *"I have seen the Lord"*.

We are called, like Mary, to testify to what we have seen.

We are here, 2,000 years later because this woman told people that she had seen the Lord.

It matters that you tell people when you have seen God, because all these years later, we're still telling her story, even though in this text, at least, Mary's best qualifications for the job of evangelist seems to be that she was willing to walk in the dark to try to find Jesus, and she recognized his voice when he called her name.

And so, like Mary, the church is called to bear witness to where we have seen God. Because you better believe there are people out there feeling the darkness, people who are isolated and feeling alone in the dark. They need to know they aren't alone.

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When I was in seminary, I had the privilege of traveling in the Middle East for a month. While it was still dark, we rode camels and then hiked up to the top of Mt Sinai in Egypt, where Moses is said to have received the 10 commandments.

It is challenging to walk up a mountain in the dark, even if your eyes adjust to the darkness and figure out how to let the moonlight be enough. And then we got to the top and sat there, waiting for the sunrise. We could hear a few other voices, but since we didn't really know what the top of the mountain looked like, it was hard to know where they were, or where we were, for that matter.

Even with the other voices, it felt like we were alone on the mountain.

Until the sun rose, and we realized there were thousands of people, from all over the world, who had also climbed the mountain while it was dark. Every different kind of clothing. People singing and praying in many different languages. It was the best kind of cacophony.

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Just as Mary couldn't hang on to the resurrected Jesus in the garden, we can't either. Because the mystery of the Resurrection is still in process and there is a world out there that needs to hear a message of hope instead of the world's message of fear and anxiety. We can't just stop on Easter morning. We have Good News to share!

**I have seen the Lord** is a first-person testimony.

When the world tries to tell us death will win, we testify we have seen and we believe something different. We have seen an empty tomb. We have seen grave clothes abandoned as unnecessary accessories. We have seen the Lord and heard him call our names.

We are people who look at the violence, injustice, and oppression in the world and still claim that Death is not going to have the last word. We are people who claim there is a mystery at work, and so we have work to do so the world may better reflect God's vision of love, justice, and peace.

We are people who have seen and believe in Life, even as we stand in the chaos of the world around us. To say I have seen the Lord is not to deny death or injustice or cruelty. It is to claim they do not have the final answer. We have walked in the darkness, and Jesus meets us there, calls us by name, and sends us out into the light of day to testify. We have seen the Lord.

There's a refrain we use often at Christmas, from the prophet Isaiah.

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

May it be an easter refrain as well. Mary's morning began while it was still dark, but it didn't end in the dark.

So, go from this place today, with refrains of alleluia still ringing in your ears, and share the Good News. Love has come, a light in the darkness. **We have seen the Lord.**

Amen.

**Benediction:**

Friends, do not hold on to the way things used to be, because new life has come. Go and tell the others: we have seen the Lord, he is risen indeed! And as you go from this place, trust that the future will be loving; that what we see as endings may still have chapters to be written. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord who calls each of us by name.

