

John 20:1-18

Early in the morning 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 taken away from the tomb. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "they have taken away the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb.

They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place.

Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying. Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She replied, "They've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni," which means teacher. Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

Sermon

Christ is Risen! **Christ is risen, indeed!** Hallelujah! Goodness, I love that word. As a word nerd, anytime I have a season that restricts my use of language, I get a bit antsy. And forgetful. As Michelle, Maggie, and Rosemary might tell you, for weeks now I've been accidentally picking music for the band that had alleluias and hallelujahs, constantly overlooking that we weren't yet in the Easter season. Sometimes, we'd change alleluia to hosanna if we really wanted to use a particular song during Lent, but when we practiced, I'd constantly forget and start to drop alleluias like they were overflowing from a bucket brimming of Easter joy. But we're an alleluia people! We're a resurrection people! Christ is Risen! **Christ is risen, indeed!**

That's right. We're an alleluia people because we're a resurrection people. We might be sinners – well, no, we're surely sinners – but in the resurrection of Jesus, God makes us saints, and so we've reason to sing hallelujahs. These bodies will face death, but in our baptisms, we're forever tied to the resurrection of Jesus, so we know that death

will never have the last word, and we'll sing hallelujah into eternity with St. Augustine and St. Macrina, with Martin Luther and Katie Luther and Martin Luther King, Jr, and grandma and grandpa, and those who died all too soon and those who lapped the rest of us and passed the century mark, with all the saints gone on before and all the saints yet to come, we'll together shout forever and ever that Christ is risen! **Christ is risen, indeed!** Hallelujah to that.

Here, on this bright Easter morning, the hallelujah passage I'm most drawn to is this: "Then the other disciple, the one who arrive at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead." I think I like mostly because it shows us that the resurrection of Jesus didn't solve all of our confusion. The disciple believed, even though they didn't yet understand that Jesus must rise from the dead. Talk about honesty at this point. We're here, witnesses of an empty tomb, and haven't yet seen Jesus. We say we believe, that Jesus truly rose from the dead, and yet we don't yet understand. That's faith. This is faith,

that we've gathered today here and not one of us, at least I assume, has ever encountered Jesus in the body. And if you do, don't forget your cell phone has a picture function. Take a photo, y'all. We believe, but we sure don't understand. At least I don't. Not always.

As a philosophy major, I used to search long and hard for the right proof for God's existence, for the perfect argument that Jesus was in fact God-become-human, for the exact details of why religion makes sense. Here's the dirty little secret. Faith doesn't make sense, at least not in terms of scientific proof. Faith isn't a math formula. No quadratic equations, no Pythagorean theorems, no theories of relativity can show us the existence of God, nor that our religious practices actually mean anything. But, when I look into the eyes of a grieving husband who desperately wants to hear Psalm 23 at his wife's funeral? That's when I see and believe, even if I don't understand. When I visit some of our oldest members who struggle to eat anything and yet yearn for the communion elements, who desire to taste Jesus one more time, I see and believe, even if I don't understand.

We gather this morning as witnesses of what we believe changed the world thousands of years ago. The Son of God, once dead, now lives, and that's forever changed the world, and so we shout our alleluias. Of course we need faith to see that and to say that, for often the world doesn't seem all that different from our perspectives. We still see injustice at work. Hunger still affects too many people.

Homelessness plagues too many of our neighbors. Too many children live without loving parents. Too many people who are black or brown or poor or differently abled or part of the LGBT community experience oppression and injustice. Too many poor people are shut out of opportunities because their lack of resources prevented them from having the same opportunities taken advantage of by other, wealthier candidates. Has this really changed the world? Should we really shout hallelujah at this resurrection?

Yet, earlier this month I spent a week with college students who could have done anything with their Spring Breaks. Gone to party in Cancun. Slept til noon at home. Got caught up, or even ahead, on

homework. And instead, they served two hundred hot meals and provided hundreds of pounds of groceries to people facing food insecurity in Bradenton, FL. They helped to clear lots alongside Habitat for Humanity so that three families might find a leg up out of poverty and into stability and community. These students put in hundreds of volunteer hours, living life for other people instead of themselves over Spring Break, all because Jesus rose from the dead. That's belief, even if we don't fully understand.

People often speak of Easter as evidence that should reinforce our belief, that should inspire our own assurance in God's existence, as though Easter is the answer to a logic problem in Philosophy 101. I think that's just so backward. Easter's not a scientific proof for God's existence, at least not one that will earn you a good grade. Instead, it's an experience of what God did, does, and will continue to do even when we doubt, even when we abandon God. Easter's our experience that tells us that God's going to show up even when we think there's no hope, even when we try to kick God out of the picture. Even when we

decidedly tell Jesus that he's not welcome in our world anymore, God welcomes us back into relationship, into the world created for our abundant life.

The point of Easter isn't rationalizing our faith. The point of Easter is wondering in the surprising, miraculously power of God that always shows up. Here, on Easter Sunday, we celebrate that Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** Jesus, leaving tyranny of death in his tomb, is the firstborn over all creation. In the words of one of our Lenten devotionals, we're reminded that, if we killed God, and life came through that, then there's literally nothing to fear. We're drawn this morning into the bright morning light of Christ's shocking appearance. Shocking because we just can't imagine this is real. Like staring over the edge of the Grand Canyon, we can't fathom the beauty, power, and majesty expressed in this vision. Like standing in the midst of a summer thunderstorm, we're surrounded by a loud, constant, flashing presence that reminds us of how tiny we are and yet, somehow, how this world was made not for our death, but for our life.

The same is true for the world. There's no proof for God's existence, no evidence that will solve experiments in a laboratory, that will convert the masses to love this God who became a human, to follow this human who died and then rose from the dead. But today, as a sign of all days, we are sent as experiences of Easter that the world might come to know Jesus and believe, even if they can't understand. We're an alleluia people, and as people experience those shouts of joy and admiration, they may experience Jesus. As people experience our belief, even though they don't understand, they too might find the courage to believe.

Today, we see one thing, one thing that we believe, even if we don't understand: Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** Today we experience this goodness, this greatness, alongside one another. But this isn't an experience we're meant to keep to ourselves. So often, I think we're embarrassed because we can't explain the fullness of our belief, or perhaps because we just can't prove that Jesus rose from the dead. What today reminds us is that even those who got to touch Jesus,

to see him risen from the dead, had the same experience. That's not something to ignore, or even feel ashamed of, for that is the very reality of faith. The very experience of this day one that tells us our logic, our physics, our expectations are too small for the massive love that God has for us all. Not even the grave can prevent God from bursting forth in love and life for us all. Faith is this, not because it's logical, but because God has worked even beyond logic. As Martin Luther said, faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, one that we can stake our life upon a thousand times. Today, we see that Jesus staked his life on that grace, that even Jesus had faith in grace, and that this love, this grace, came through alive. Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** Amen.