

Easter Sunday 2021
Rev. Adam T. Trambley
John 20:1-18
April 4, 2021, St. John's Sharon, Parking Lot Service

Early in the morning on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. She was frightened, exhausted, overwhelmed, and deeply, deeply sad. She had witnessed the horrifying torture and death of the teacher and friend whom she had loved, and who had changed her life. When she got to the tomb, the stone was rolled away and she could not find the body. She believed that there was another tragedy. Maybe the Roman authorities has re-taken the body, since they often did not allow criminals to have a respectful burial. Maybe the guy who donated the tomb wanted it back. In anguish, she runs to Peter and John, and the two of them run to the tomb. They are also confused and overwhelmed, and frightened.

John gets there first, but waits for Peter. Peter goes in, sees the burial clothes and leaves. Then John goes in, not understanding the scriptures Jesus had shared with them about him rising from the dead. But somehow in that moment of being in the tomb, Jesus' beloved disciple receives what he needs in order to believe. Peter will also receive it later, when the resurrected Jesus appears to him personally. Scripture doesn't tell us the details of that encounter, but Paul and Luke both write about it. Then Peter and John go home.

Mary, too tired to run and keep up with the others, finally gets back to the tomb. She breaks down weeping, probably not for the first time that morning. In her cleansing tears, she sees two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been laid. Then she sees someone whom she can't recognize. In her trauma, all she can hope for is that a gardener might know where Jesus' body is so she can honor it and grieve properly. Then Jesus calls her by name, "Mary", and she knows her teacher, and runs back to tell the others, "I have seen the Lord."

John's gospel describes the experiences of these three people as they witness the empty tomb. All are confused and broken and hurting. All of them see the same tomb, and yet each sees something different. Each has an individual experience that allows them to know deeply and fully that Jesus has risen from the dead. There are grave clothes. There are angels. There are recollections of past teaching. There are personal appearances of the risen Jesus. Whatever they need.

We are all dealing with our own traumas and tragedies, our own pain and brokenness. What we have done has hurt others and what they have done has hurt us. People we love have died, and we may still be in mourning. This human condition is constant, and the past year has added significantly to our losses. This morning we come to see the empty tomb. We come knowing more of the story than Mary and Peter and John did, so we come looking for the joy of the resurrection and not the grief of death. Yet, maybe especially this year, amid a pandemic, in a nation increasingly divided, in a parking lot or over the internet, that joy of the resurrection can seem harder to grasp. We are more exhausted, have seen more death, and miss some of the people and things that have brought us to an experience of joy and life in the past.

In the midst of everything, Jesus is still showing up for us today. Whatever we need, wherever we are, however much we may be overwhelmed or grieving, Jesus will come with what we need. He promises us that he has overcome death. He promises us forgiveness of sins and a fresh start. He promises us the joy of the resurrection renewing the whole world.

This Easter especially, take the time to look for that resurrection joy. Take the time to run to the tomb, to look around, and to let your tears flow freely until you can begin to laugh. Let Jesus' presence surround you and hold you and comfort you. Grasp onto what you experience and tell yourself and others, "I HAVE seen the Lord," and live into the joy of that great good news.

I don't know what you need this Easter. I'm not even sure what I need this Easter, except for Jesus to show up for me one more time. I know that I'm showing up here today because I believe if I do, I will experience the risen Jesus. And you showed up, and you will experience him, too. Alleluia! Christ is Risen!