

He Is Risen Indeed!; John 20:1-18 (Easter 1C)
Second Presbyterian Church
M. Evelyn Graham
April 20, 2025

Today's reading is the resurrection story told from John's perspective. Listen for God's word to us.

Scripture:

²⁰Early 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. ²So 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.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and 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. ¹³They 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.' ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus 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.' ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus 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."' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Sermon:

Do you remember the days of Polaroid cameras?

We'd take a big clunky camera, point it at something, press the button, and it would shoot out a flat white rimmed picture of nothing. The picture was all black, but as we waited, the black picture gradually began to come into view. After a few minutes, the black picture gradually became a color photo of whatever it was we wanted to capture.

It always amazed me that someone would take a Polaroid picture, and we would sit around watching the picture come to life before our very eyes. The process seemed miraculous. We knew what the picture was meant to be, but we didn't know exactly what would show up once the picture became clear. Gradually, we saw what the photographer wanted us to see.

Jesus was considered a political and religious criminal to the powers of his day. Why? Because he upset the status quo of those in power. He loved the sinner rather than accused them of their sin. He healed the sick whose illness was often exacerbated by those in power. He condemned the rich and powerful, who mostly held positions of privilege.

According to Matthew, the religious authorities were so afraid of Jesus' resurrection, they went to Pilate and asked him to secure Jesus' tomb in case his followers tried to steal his body. Even Pilate refused to be a part of their scheme, so they had the rock sealed and sent guards to watch over the tomb.

It is no wonder those who held position of power and privilege tried in vain to prevent his resurrection and those on the margins anticipated his return.

Easter morning, like a Polaroid picture, began in darkness. The morning also continued the sadness, uncertainly and fear. After all, almost any time of traumatic change can bring on sadness, uncertainly and fear for those who must change. Mary in her sadness ventures to the tomb while it is still dark.

But as the light of dawn begins to overcome the darkness, our dark Polaroid picture begins to come into focus. In John's version of the resurrection, Mary sees the open tomb no longer covered by a stone. I imagine she was so surprised and baffled that the stone has been removed, that she runs to tell the disciples. She needs to share her knowledge with them. *They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him* (v 2).

What happens next is that our picture comes into focus in three different ways, as we see three different responses to Jesus' resurrection, Peter's response, the "other disciple['s] and Mary's response.

The other disciple arrives first, looks in the tomb and sees the linen wrappings, but he does not go in the tomb. Perhaps the linen wrappings remind him of the last few days of Jesus' life: the ugliness, the torture, the blood and gore of Friday and the ordeal to which his Lord was subjected. It is too much to

remember, so he chooses to forget by not going any further. Sometimes we, like this other disciple, want to forget the pain and trauma, so we choose denial rather than face the reality of our pain. We don't welcome the change and the pain of it all, so we pretend all is well and hope the inevitable will go away.

Peter arrives next. He also sees the linen wrappings, but he sees something the "other disciple" didn't see, a separate cloth rolled up in a corner by itself that was used to cover Jesus' head. I'm guessing the tomb had to be a mess. Linen wrappings used to cover a violently executed person, must have been gory. Perhaps this traumatic scene reminds Peter of his three-fold denial and fills him with shame and regret that he didn't stand up for Jesus. Sometimes we, like Peter, are filled with so much shame by our own actions or inactions that we cannot accept the change. We only see the resurrection through our own inability to prevent what happened. We cannot accept the love and forgiveness offered by Jesus' life-saving death and resurrection.

Mary, the first one to see the stone missing, is the last one to look inside the tomb, according to John. When Mary looks in, she either doesn't see the linen wrappings or the rolled up cloth, or maybe she doesn't notice them. What she sees is two angels in white. They ask, "Women, why are you weeping? (v 13)"

They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.
(v 13)

Mary doesn't see or imagine the trauma from Friday. Mary does not pretend the horror didn't occur, nor does she feel shame and guilt because of it. In Mary's picture she sees only life in the form of a gardener. The gardener who helps to give life to the garden and the angels who give life to her through their message. Mary sees a picture of new life offered by Jesus through his resurrection. Yes, a resurrection only brought about by his suffering and death, but new life given to her.

Mary, unlike Peter and the "other disciple", is able to see past the trauma and death of Friday to the new possibility of a resurrected life. She lives not in the past of denial and shame but in the resurrected hope of the future. In the words of the modern theologian John van de Laar, "It is tempting in times of pain, suffering and change to see death as the end... But sometimes there needs to be a death before life can resurrect. And, when it does, our best efforts to shut [the pain and suffering] away will [always] fail."¹

Just as I remember Polaroid cameras, I remember the first time I ever saw a digital camera that took a picture one could see immediately. The year was 1993. There were no iPhones. We were all using standard film with negatives. Pictures

¹ John van de Laar, "Sacredise Daily Worship, 13-19 April 2025: Holy Saturday, 19 April 2025," from Sacredise website, <https://sacredise.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-04-13-19.pdf> accessed 4/29/25.

has to be developed in a darkroom before we could see the picture we'd taken. Brent and I were on a flight traveling to San Diego. A gentleman sitting next to us had a digital camera and he showed us pictures on his camera he had taken of places we were hoping to see in San Diego. I was completely amazed that the pictures were instantaneous. Wouldn't it be nice if the miracle of change worked that way? No death, no pain, no waiting.

The good news of Easter is this: we already live in a resurrected world. We can see the resurrection in the spring flowers, the green leaves on the trees, and the sunrise every morning. New life is ours, right now, if we just believe and accept it. We no longer need to live in fear. We no longer need to feel guilt and shame. We no longer need to wait for the Polaroid to develop. The picture is clear. Jesus died that we might live, now, today. Sometimes we need to be reminded that the life God promises is ours today. Mary saw this new life clearly on that morning long ago. She saw the resurrected Jesus, the giver of life, and she proclaimed, "I have seen the Lord!"

May we announce to all, just as Mary did, *I have seen the Lord* (v 18); he is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!