

# “Recognizing Resurrection

*Matthew 28:1-6 & John 20:1-18*

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**Prayer for Understanding** Rabbouni, Teacher, We have spent the past six weeks asking questions. We have turned over every rock. We have shined a light in every dusty corner. We have opened the blinds. We have wrestled with truth. We have sought after you. So on this Easter morning, bring wisdom to our seeking. Move through this room until the walls echo with the sound of alleluias. Roll back the stones that might prevent us from drawing closer to you. Calm our hearts. Say our names. Awaken us to your presence in our midst. We are here. We are listening. We are seeking after you. Alleluia. Amen.

Do you struggle with fear and fear’s companions, anxiety and worry? Do you struggle with any of the ways fear may cause you to be a procrastinator, rule follower, people pleaser, outcast, self-doubter, excuse maker, or pessimist? Everyone struggles with some aspect of fear.

On the first Easter morning, fear was initially the dominant emotion. Put yourself in the sandals of the two women as they came to the tomb. As soon as they arrived, there “was a violent earthquake”. The soldiers were so terrified by the appearance of angels that they fainted. The angel said, “Do not be afraid.” He knew what they were feeling, and he wanted to comfort and encourage them.

“Fear not!” is the most repeated command in the Bible. The command is given in a variety of forms, such as “Do not be afraid,” “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” and “receive peace”. Let your fears be swallowed with your trust that God is always with you, giving you peace in the middle of stress, danger, and uncertainty. Let your fears be overcome with the glory of resurrection.

“Fear not!” is more easily said than done. Some find that being free of fear is the most challenging of God’s commandments to keep. Many believe that the opposite of fear is love. Therefore, when one is free of fear, they are able to love all people, love self, and love God. Easter invites us to replace our fears with the promise of glorious resurrection. Easter invites us to move from fear to joy. Most struggle with “Fear Not!” because we are afraid of so much. We worry. The words spoken by the angel on Easter morning are for you and for everyone. “Do not be afraid.” The very worst thing that could possibly happen — the death of God’s Son on a cross — has now been overcome by the resurrection. Darkness has been replaced by light and death has been replaced by new life. We do not need to fear the future, because Jesus is in the future just as Jesus is in the present. Jesus is always with us. Jesus is calling us forward and promises to get us through every form of death to delightful, lush green meadows, overflowing with every blessing where there is a place for us at a banquet table overflowing with every form of goodness, love, and joy. Most of our fears are grounded in uncertainty about the future. Easter promises that we can be certain that we will enjoy glorious resurrection with all people in a resurrected cosmos for eternity.

After visions of Jesus, Julian of Norwich wrote: “All will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.” This was not just wishful thinking for Julian, because she had life-long struggles during a time when there was a devastating pandemic and a political revolution. She was able to say, “All will be well,” because she discovered the resurrection glory of God’s love. Savoring

God's love disperses fear. Imagining the glory of resurrection transforms fear into joy. It is possible to keep the commandment to "Fear not!" because we have a risen Lord who has overcome anything that can hurt us."

Today, all is not well. Mahri Leonard-Fleckman has studied Julian's life and is certain Julian would still say, "All will be well," today. Julian would understand our mixed feelings. In context, her revelation that "all will be well" was not soothing, at least not at first. It was shocking. By her account, she took in the divine words "heavily" and "mournfully" and with "very great fear." Her instant response was, essentially, how could this possibly be, given the reality of pain, suffering, and human frailty? Julian's life was devoted to and absorbed by divine encounter. As she continued to experience God's grace, mysteries slowly unfolded into more profound insight. As resurrection overcame her fear, her descriptions of "all will be well" in the midst of chaos, tragedy, and death is thrilling.

The gospel of Matthew proclaims: **Matthew 28:1-6 NLT "Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. Jesus isn't here! Jesus is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying."**

The spring of 2000 was a fearful time for me. Leslie had quit her job to give birth to Spencer. I would need to find a church to serve to support our family. Which church? In a month, we would be required to vacate seminary housing. Can we find a place to live in time? We were halfway across the country from family. How will we move everything, establish a new home, and care for a newborn all by ourselves?

I went hiking to experience God and calm my fears. Unlike most hikes, my fears were growing. I reached a rock outcropping that was supposed to have a nice view. I was in a cloud and could see nothing. I sat on the edge of the rock praying and staring into the dense cloud. Suddenly, a breeze lifted the cloud revealing a spectacular view and a sense of peace blew away all my fears. God assured me that life is like sitting on that rock. Most of the time we cannot see the beauty, the next step on our journey, however God knows the future glory that awaits us.

When Mary finds the tomb empty, she stands weeping at the vacant grave. Jesus is right there with her and asks her: "Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" In the haze of grief, Mary cannot see Jesus. Then Jesus calls her by name, Mary, and the veil is lifted and she beholds the resurrected Christ. On this Easter morning, who—or what—are you looking for? What types of tombs do you find yourself in? What veils need to be lifted so you can recognize God's resurrections in your life, the resurrections in others, and the resurrections throughout the cosmos?

The gospel of John proclaims: **John 20:1-18 NLT "Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there,**

while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home. Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her. "Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him." "Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher"). "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my siblings and tell them, 'I am ascending to my parent and your parent, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them Jesus' message.

"Lost and Found"

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

Mary wept.

Standing in the garden,  
soft dirt under her feet,  
sun still tucked away,  
sleeping under the horizon.

The other disciples left,  
but Mary stayed.

Mary wept.

Shoulders shaking,  
tears running down her face.

She said, They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they put him.

But here's what Easter taught me:

if you think you've lost God,  
if it feels like heaven has slipped through the cracks,  
if you feel like the night will never end,  
then know, there is no hide-and-seek with the divine  
that doesn't end in you being found.

Stay still.

Keep breathing.

God is closer than you think.

Pastor Danielle Shroyer writes of Mary, "She loved all of Jesus, because through Jesus she had experienced a love that embraced all of her. This is the wholeness that heals the world and brings us into eternal life." As our seeking journey continues into Easter, how will you continue to seek a love that makes you whole?

Our Lenten journey has been one of seeking and asking questions. And this Easter morning, they bring us to the culminating question: "Who are you looking for?" All this time, we have been seeking: seeking answers, seeking guidance, seeking Jesus. The responses we get depend on what—or who—we are looking for. In every question, a picture of Jesus has been

forming in your mind. Who is Jesus to you? What is Jesus capable of? As Mary weeps at the empty tomb, the picture she has formed in her mind is one of tragedy. Jesus has died, and now someone has gone so far as to steal his body. This is her cry, even in the face of two mysterious figures robed in white. And then she turns around. She sees a man standing there. She does not see that it is Jesus. She sees only in her grief, and only through the lens of tragedy. Jesus says to her, “Why do you weep? And who do you want?”

“Who do you want?” What an interesting question. Of all the versions of Jesus out there, which one do you believe? For which Jesus are you crying? Who do you want? Was a veil lifted revealing what Mary needed, transforming her wants? Through Easter does God reveal to each of us what we need, so we can embrace our pure wants and let go of our impure wants? Jesus is big enough to be everything everyone needs. Did the disciples experience Easter through Mary, because Mary suddenly was without fear, full of peace and aglow with resurrection glory? Was Mary lifting a veil for all of them enabling them to see more of Jesus? Beyond teacher, beyond healer, beyond savior. Were they suddenly able to see Jesus the resurrector of everyone and resurrector of the cosmos? Were they suddenly able to truly see themselves, to name all their fears and see that God loves all of them, to see that God is overcoming every fear, making our joy complete and our love whole. Was this wholeness lifting the veils of earthly life enabling them to see the ways God is transforming all with grace, making all glorious. A mystery of Easter is God lifting every veil. You have unique insights and blessings God is eager to give you. We all have insights and blessings we all will share. We will see the resurrected Jesus in the fullness of God’s glory. All will be well. Amen