

4.9.23 Sermon

Easter Celebration Service

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jesus, tomb, moment, mary, peter, disciple, lives, john, risen, remained, resurrected, cling, loss, tweak, space, understand, turned, weeping, emptiness, folded

SPEAKERS:

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This morning, I was going to just preach from the Word because I love this story, I know this story, and I have studied it for many years. Yesterday, as I was sitting quietly, I kind of wrote a devotional as I was writing in my journal. So, I'm actually going to preach from my journal this morning. What it also does is it helps us in this room because, if I were going to preach just from reading this and not having a sermon, we might be here for like two more hours. So, being that it's Easter, I'm going to control myself and preach from my journey.

Our text is John 20, starting with verse one. We've been talking a lot about perspective and perception. Often, the way we hear things is sifted through our perception and perspective of who God is. If you have a judgmental idea of God, that's how you hear things. And if we have a loving, grace-filled idea of God, that's how we hear things. Perception is so important.

I told the elder team when we were out praying earlier that I was going to stick to my text, and James lovingly said, "Yeah, I give you 20 minutes." James... it didn't even last a minute; I'm already off it. But here's our text, John 20:1: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So, she came

running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one that Jesus loved. And she said, 'They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they put him.' And so, Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first." Why does he have to say that? Really, why?

And he bent over and he looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in. And then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. And He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus's head. And the cloth was folded up by itself separate from the linen. And finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first, also went inside, he saw and he believed, and they still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

And then the disciple went back to their home. But Mary stood outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus's body had been one at the head and the other at the foot. And they asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

And she said, "Because they've taken my lord away, and I don't know where they've put them." And at this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus. And he said, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for?"

And thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I'll get him." And Jesus said to her, "Mary," and she turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic were bone I, which means teacher. And Jesus said, "Don't hold on to me for I've not yet returned to the father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I'm returning to my father and to your father, to my God and to your God." And Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news. "I have seen the Lord," she said to them.

She told them that he had said these things to her. Such an interesting story. Richard Rohr says this: "Most of us don't see things as they are. We see things as we are." So much of our life is about how we see things and how we interpret

them. Just pause on that for a minute. "Most of us don't see things as they are. We see things as we are."

The story of the tomb is about so much; it's about perspective. I know it's, of course, about the resurrection. I know that, but it's about perspective. And it's about how you read this story. So early on the first day, while it was still dark, those words are so poignant to me. Because Mary didn't wait for things to be brighter.

Mary went to the place of her loss and her death while it was still dark. While there was still no light, while there was still no illumination, nothing to light her path, Mary went to the tomb. She walked directly into the very thing that was causing her pain. Mary made space for her trauma. And she met it while it was still dark. She had no idea what was going to happen when she went there. She met her darkness head-on. And when she got there, she saw that the tomb was empty.

Just like all of us, when we call out for Jesus, and we go back to that space where we think he's going to be, and all we hear is silence. And we assume that he's gone. And we assume that he's not listening. And we assume that he's disappeared. And she assumed the same thing, that he was nowhere to be seen. But that wasn't the case. The truth was, at this moment, quite the opposite was true. He was more present than he had ever been. And she didn't know he was alive. And he was about the father's business. And she didn't know because all she saw was emptiness. All she saw was that darkness. All she saw were the broken promises, and not understanding what had happened. And so, she freaks out.

And she runs to get Simon Peter and the one that Jesus loved. So interesting to me. And it's believed that this is John. And it's so interesting to me, why was it necessary for John to say that? Why was it necessary for him to write this down? And to say, the one that Jesus love, like, was he reassuring himself? Was it his ego? It's such a human moment for me. There's not a lot for me my interpretation of spirituality in this moment that he has to say, Peter, and the one that Jesus

Why is he setting himself apart is that and it also tells me he doesn't yet get it? Yes, John, you're the one that Jesus loves. But he loves Peter, just as much. It feels very specific to me. And in opposition to Peter. You know, many want to get that person who's always in our way. Me, many of us want to dig down into somebody and be like, I'm the one that God loves not you. Many of us want to label those people that irritate us, or maybe even those people that believe different, or maybe those people that we label our enemy. And they say, Yeah, but God loves me. God loves me, not you, Peter.

Something interesting to think about. So, they've taken the Lord is what she says. But again, perspective, that interpretation of a moment that isn't fully seen or isn't fully understood. How many times do we interpret a moment in our lives or a circumstance in our lives that isn't really fully seen or understood? And we automatically assume that the tomb is empty, and the only thing that's left are those rags for us.

And once again, as they get to that tomb and John makes sure that he says that he beat Peter there. Why is he tweaking him? See, I have a theory that John didn't like Peter. Don't be thinking for a minute that these disciples liked each other. Because I don't believe it. Do you know why I don't believe it because they were human, put 12 people together for three years. Yeah, we all get it. We all know that we'd all be in fighting with one another. So why is he tweak and Peter here? And he says it a number of times, they ran to the other disciple, he beat the other disciple, both were running, but the other disciple out read Peter, he beat him to the tomb. It's so interesting that he said, he says it like four times that he beat them. It's such a tweak.

And I, it's yeah, it's such an interesting dynamic. But here's what's so interesting to me, is, there are those people that are in our lives that are always annoying us. And we like to tweak them in little ways with how much better we might be, or how we outrun them, or how we just do things a little more right than they do, how we win a little. And we like to put them in their place in passive-aggressive ways that everybody can read, that we know what we're doing.

And the truth is, we don't realize this, it only takes away from us. It actually is a loss of our own dignity. It's actually a loss of our own self-worth. And actually, what we're doing when we are passive-aggressive, or pushing against, like John is doing here, I really think he is, in my opinion, being a little bit passive aggressive. He's losing. Not Peter, he's losing.

So, John then bends over. And he simply looks in. And he is not willing to go into the tomb. He just looks in and he sees the rags. And he backs up, because he doesn't want to go into that space of emptiness, and that space of loss. So often, when it comes to our own pain and our own trauma, our response is to avoid at all costs. But what we don't know is the resurrected Jesus is waiting to resurrect our lives as well.

It doesn't work. Can I tell you, it doesn't work to avoid pain. It doesn't work to avoid trauma. It doesn't work to try to run from it because it lives. It lives in our cells. It lives in our bodies. And it is tucked away in the corner of our mind. It's so important to find the space that we can process those things.

Now, Peter, and this is why I think that John gets annoyed with Peter, because Peter just pushes past John. And that man walks right into that tomb. He's going to investigate them. But then once again, in this little thing, John writes, and Peter, who was behind him, walks into the he's tweaking them again.

Even though Peter decides he's going to walk into that, too. He's going to look around, and he's going to face that emptiness. And he's going to look at those rags. And he's going to notice that not only are they messed up, but one of them is folded neatly. It's interesting that they say one of them was folded neatly. And I'm so curious about that, because my theory again, my theory is no proof at the text in this this is the way my brain works. It's like the angel took off Jesus's head covering first and folded it and then Jesus took the rest of his grave clothes off and just threw them around the room.

But you know, it was a clue. Somebody took the time to fold the grave cloth but they missed that clue. And Peter also takes that grave, the tomb for what it is empty. And they don't question they just leave. And then in before they leave,

after Peter goes in, then John enters in. And it says that he sees him believing but here's what's an I don't know what he believes, because right after that it says, it says that they all hold on, let me find it. Right after that. It says that they are I know what it says it says that they did not know that he was risen, going to rise from the dead, they did not remember the scripture that he was going to rise from the dead. And so, they leave, and they go back home and see perspective, they leave, they leave.

But Mary, Mary remains just like she did at the foot of the cross. When all the other disciples ran away, Mary and the other women stayed in the place of pain. They stayed in a place of crucifixion, they stayed in a place and gave space to their friend.

They stayed and remained and faced their loss, and faced not understanding about Jesus's crucifixion. But they stayed. And Mary does the same thing. Here, she stays and she faces her loss. She faces her fears she faces that's that empty tomb. And she gives space for her own trauma.

And she allows herself the grief of that moment, openly and loudly. Because that weeping there means loud wailing. She stood outside that tomb, and she wept, she remained in the place of loss. My prayer is that we would learn how to remain in our loss, and how to grieve our, our sadness, and how to give space to ourselves, to face those things. Because you know why? We will make it we will survive. Our pain will not kill us. We don't like it. It's not a fun place to be. But it will not kill us. Do you know how I know that? Because the one who was resurrected, remains with us in the midst of it, no matter how deep or confusing it is.

And so, Mary waited. She waited and she stayed. And she looks into the tomb again, and she sees the angels and the angels ask, "Woman, why are you crying?" Perspective again, perception again, because to them, Jesus has risen. As a matter of fact, to them, they can look behind her. And they can see that Jesus is behind her. And she has no idea that he's there. And she's weeping. And she's like, they've taken my savior they've taken the one that I love, they've taken them away, but they haven't. Perspective.

It's always about perspective. Because in the angel's eyes, Jesus is risen. He's present. Jesus is always here with us. It is not dependent on our circumstances. It is not dependent on magic prayers. It is not dependent on anything, but the fact that Jesus is with us. Jesus surrounds us. From the beauty that we see in nature, to whales, to ladybugs, to spiders, to snakes, to trees, to whatever it is, Jesus's very life breathes forth in every moment of every day, that we are alive here on Earth. We are never alone, never alone.

And what's so interesting is when Mary is thinking, the tomb is most empty. When we are thinking the tomb is most empty and that Jesus is nowhere to be found. He is right behind us. And He is calling us. And he is whispering our names. And he's waiting for us to turn around and to look and to see him. He's waiting for us to open our hearts and to find him in the most painful moments, to the most beautiful moments to every moment.

So, Mary is caught in her own story. Mary has a story going in her mind of what happened. And then there's the truth of what's happening. We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are. Mary is caught in her own interpretation of the situation. And then she turns around and she looks, and there he stands. And she doesn't see him, even though he's right there. How often? Do we not see Jesus? I don't know, every day? How often do we live our lives asleep? When every moment and every second of every day? He is with us. He is risen every moment.

And so, he looks at her as she turns around, and he also asks her, why are you crying? Because he fully expects her to know. He fully expects her to understand that he's risen. I've been kind of telling you this the whole time. Right? It's empty, because I'm here. But she doesn't see him.

He's standing in front of her. And she continues to live out of her own interpretation and her own story of what is going on here. Take that in. He is standing directly in front of her. They are talking, she sees him. And she is living out of her own story and interpretation of what is happening in that moment, so much so that she can't see Jesus. Does anybody live there?

Right. We have our own story, and our own interpretation of what is happening in any given moment in our life, any given moment. And then there's the story that Jesus is living. The cutest thing ever. How can you not be distracted by that? So, it's such an image of humanity for me. Because Jesus is here, every moment, in every circumstance, beautiful moment, ugly moment, confusing moment, great moments, mountaintop moment, Valley moments. Jesus never moves. Our vision changes. And we begin to interpret the Bible, interpret the moment, interpret even God, from the story that we have going in our own heads. How do we not do that?

Invitation to God, let me see you in this moment. Let me find you in this moment. Let me know that you are here in this moment. Because so often what happens to us is two things. One of them is why God. The second one is where are you God? And even the third one is Why did you do this to me, God?

We carry all three of those within us. But Jesus doesn't move from Mary when she looks at him and says to him, "Sir, where did you put him? Where did you put my savior? Where did you put the one that I love?" And he calls out her name. I love that so much.

It's that intimate personal marker, from which we're all known and all saying our names. And Jesus knows them all. And he calls our names every second of every day, inviting us to see.

And I truly believe that if Peter and John would have stayed, they would have had this experience. I truly believe that if they would have remained in that place of confusion in that place of loss, and that place of pain, and they wouldn't have been quick to go home, there would have been three people having this moment with Jesus, not just one.

But because she held that space for her pain. Because she held that space and was willing to remain where she was trying to figure it out, weeping and wailing. Just being there, not running from it. She found the resurrected Lord, face to face. And then, because she held that space, it says she turned toward him, after

he calls her name, and I truly believe what that means is that her heart turned towards them because she was already facing him, she turned around.

And I believe that that means that she turned towards him, her heart went, "Oh, I see you." When we give space to God, when we, in horrifying, difficult moments, we turn ourselves towards him. It just opens something up in us, not in God. God is there in us to find and to see God in these moments.

And then he says to her, "Don't cling to me, because I have yet to go to my father." And I really believe what that means is, "Mary, don't cling to my physical presence here in this moment. Don't cling to what you see to here." He says, "Go tell the disciples," because so often, we cling to this physical world. So often we cling to the things that we think are going to make us happy – people, places, things that we think are going to make us happy. And so, we cling to these physical things that we're surrounded by, thinking that they're going to fill us, and they don't.

So, he says to her, "Mary, go tell the disciples." And the first apostle is commissioned in a female body. And Jesus continues to turn the religious world on its feet, ear, however you say that, on his heels.

So, my message this morning: Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid of the tomb. Don't be afraid of the rags. Don't be afraid of those rags that seem like they're just discarded, and that they're lost dreams, lost hopes. Don't be afraid of that. Don't be afraid of the pain or the hurt or the loss. Make space. Jesus is with you. Jesus is calling your name. Always, every moment, every moment.

Don't shy away from any of it, but hold space. Because this is what I know: Jesus will find you. Jesus will chase you. Jesus will not stop chasing you. He will forever chase you down. Don't cling to the physical. Don't think that life on this earth is going to be wrapped up in a neat, nice bow and everything should go right? Because it ain't going to happen.

We are all in the same boat. We are all in the same boat of a mess that we live in. All of our families are imperfect. All of our parents are annoying. I'm a parent.

I'm annoying to my children. I admit it. All of us are screwed up. Every one of us. Our lives run in peaks, and our lives run in valleys.

And Jesus is in the midst of it all. Trust that Jesus, in His resurrected state, is with the Father, is with the mother, is with all of this beautiful Trinitarian dance that none of us understand, and tending to us in this world. We are not alone. We are not alone.

As I look around the world and things seem weirder and worse, my mantra every morning is: we are not alone. He has not abandoned us. No matter how hopeless it might look, no matter how it might look to you, remember that we are never alone in this journey.