

April 17, 2022

John 20:11-18

¹¹But 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 around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” 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 God, my Parent. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Parent and your Parent, 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.

I love Easter. I love Easter eggs and Easter baskets filled with chocolate. I love the excuse for having family and friends to an Easter feast. I love seeing everyone gather in worship. I even love getting dressed up for church. I love Easter.

I sometimes fear that people find more joy in the party than in the reason for the season: The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many people in liberal Christian churches, like ours, know the reason for the season, but are a bit uncertain about the bodily resurrection. Many accept it by referencing spring,

the rebirth of nature after the death of winter. They struggle, though, with trying to deal with more conservative Christians pushing them to believe in a resuscitated body.

In his book, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time, Marcus Borg argues that the biblical accounts of Jesus’s resurrection are not about a resuscitated body at all. The fact that for centuries now church leaders have required a belief in a physically resuscitated body means that we will have to re-image the resurrected Jesus, if we want to experience the truth of the resurrection.

How do we do this? Let’s begin at the beginning.

Jesus’s followers experienced something so powerful it transformed their lives. They explained this “experience” as Jesus’s resurrection. They claimed he walked with them and he talked with them. Today, 2,000-plus years later, most of us would like to experience the disciples’ resurrection experience.

I would like to posit, on this Easter Sunday, that many, if not all, of you gathered here have experienced the resurrected Jesus in your lives. You just might not have recognized him.

How often have you asked yourself this question: “Where and when have I seen/experienced the resurrected Jesus in my life?” Does that sound too crazy? How much crazier does that sound than the story Jesus’s disciples told?

Remember we need to reimage the resurrected Jesus. I am not asking you to meet a Middle Eastern man born 2,000-plus years ago. In fact, maybe the Jesus you met isn’t even a physical reality, at least not in a physically resuscitated, 2,000-plus-years-old body.

Think about the scripture story just read. Mary has come to the garden to mourn Jesus's death and to prepare the body for a proper burial. She wants to give the body the respect it deserved. Her mourning was deepened when she discovered the body missing. In her struggle to understand the empty tomb she probably feared that Joseph of Arimathea had decided not to allow Jesus's body to remain in the tomb, perhaps because it was too politically inconvenient for Joseph. So, when Mary sees the gardener, she offers to take care of the body, to move the politically offensive body into her care.

Tearfully, she shares her allegiance to Jesus with the supposed gardener, who responds to her pleading by calling her by name. He is saying you are known, your sorrow is heard. Mary was touched by the grace of that moment and recognized Jesus in the kindness of the gardener. In that moment of grace Mary experienced Jesus's promise fulfilled: He would be with them, even unto the end of the age. Jesus Christ is risen.

Most of the Bible stories about resurrection experiences start with a follower not recognizing the person as Jesus. After walking to Emmaus, it is only in the breaking of bread that the two disciples recognized Jesus.

What does this tell us? It is saying that Jesus is found in relationship; found in those moments when we have been opened to God's unconditional welcome and grace and love. Those moments are most often found in and through another person; someone who touched us, supported us, carried us, when we needed it most. This is how the grace of God works. We know this, because this is what Jesus taught us. Each time we recognize God's grace in our lives, we are experiencing, we are meeting Jesus.

This past Lenten season here at Edgewood Church we have been sharing with one another in worship the times in our lives when we have experienced God's presence and grace in our lives. It has been wonderful. I have heard from many, both in worship and in conversations, how often God's grace and love had been communicated to them by members and friends here at Edgewood Church – in Sunday School, youth events, May breakfasts, fund-raising events, the thrift store. The more our hearts see and name God's grace all around us, the more our life's tears, like Mary's, will be changed from tears of sorrow to tears of joy.

So, as we enter this season of Easter, keep your hearts wide-open to meeting Jesus. You begin to do this by living your life as if each person you meet is the resurrected Jesus. Just imagine how your interactions with the world around you might change, if you are expecting Jesus in each encounter.

If you seek to reimage the resurrected Jesus in this way, I promise you, you will be amazed. Not only because of how often you will meet Jesus, but how often you can be Jesus for someone else.

Friends, Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Thanks be to God! Amen.