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I Have Seen the Lord  
The United Church of Broomfield  
EASTER  
April 9, 2023

John 20:1-18 (NRSVue)

1 Early 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. 2 So 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." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then 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, 12 and 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. 13 They 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." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus 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." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not touch 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.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

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Good morning my church family.  
Christ is Risen – Christ is Risen, Indeed!

We're all familiar with the Easter story, yes? Having been crucified two days earlier, Jesus rose from the grave. He conquered death! And because of the resurrection of Jesus, we all have eternal life with our God and creator. It's pretty clear – for the most part. Easter morning is bright, beautiful, joyous and comforting. \*\*  
When it comes to understanding the Easter story, Christians may go through a period of doubting and darkness as they process, but eventually accept the details of that first morning; it's relatively calm and reflective. We have the pleasure of Monday-morning quarterbacking as we take it all in and try to understand.

But reflect on that first morning.

Consider the people and life as it was in Jerusalem.

Daily life was challenging but think about the pandemonium of *that* Passover week and all the trauma, torture, and pain that happened. The extreme emotions. The intensity that was palpable in the air for everyone.

Feelings and reactions were all over the place that morning as each new person experienced the unfolding Easter resurrection; as the light dawned upon a dark morning.

Jesus died! We saw it.

He was buried! We saw that.

His body ***was in that tomb!*** But now it's not?

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Mary arrived at the tomb in pre-dawn obscurity, mournful and weeping. Then she witnessed that something was amiss – the stone was moved. Grave robbers? Pilate's soldiers? Afraid, confused - she ran for help.

Simon Peter and the other disciple then arrived; they investigated the tomb more closely, independent of one another. Simon Peter saw this. The other disciple saw that. Where's the body? The burial garments are still here. Did anyone see anything? What do I do now? There was confusion and disorientation as logical reasoning tries to kick in. Could it be? Is the confusion replaced with understanding? A glimmer of light? They ran back home. To do what?

Mary was abandoned at the tomb, in shock and dismay, sorrowful and grieving. She saw two angels. Did she know they were angels and not people? There was no reaction by her to these mysterious beings suddenly in the tomb and offering compassionate inquiries. Was she feeling numb? Mary sadly replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

Turning around, yet another person appeared. A gardener? He also offered a compassionate inquiry. Mary replied .... with tear-filled anger? ... or perhaps with a sudden resolute and adrenaline-filled confidence? "Did you take my Lord? If yes, tell me right now, so I can get him."

THEN. Saying her name, "Mary," ... it dawns on her. She sees that it is Jesus. "Teacher!?"

Shock? Disbelief? Joy?

Before she could say or do anything more, Jesus instructed her to go and tell the others, to which she did and said to them, "The Lord is Risen, Indeed!" No, that's not what she says. "I found Jesus!" No, not that either. "I have seen the Lord." "I have seen the Lord."

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The resurrection of Christ begins with such confusion and lack of clarity. Actual and symbolic darkness. What happened? Are you sure? Am I seeing what I'm seeing? I can't believe it. \*\* These first witnesses are humans without agendas encountering something totally unprecedented and left with nothing but their real, human emotions and doubt to figure it all out, to report what they know and see.

Also, it is **not** Jesus' closest disciples, the men he hand-picked to learn his new way of embodying God's law and love who get a handle on this miracle and marshal this message to its first hearers. It is Mary Magdalene, who stands by the tomb in her grief, who is too timid or maybe too respectful to go inside it like they did, who first begins to understand what God has done. It is Mary Magdalene, whose honest response of sorrow honors all our grief at what death can do. All those who have ever stood at a graveside weeping, who have struggled to carry on like normal after the death of a loved one, or who have felt so isolated by grief --- they are there with Mary, seemingly alone.

Loneliness and despair are not how Mary's story ends, though. Easter puts a twist ending on all the grief we bear, all the sorrow we carry with us through **this** life. As she stands there, she is approached by the very Lord himself, and she only recognizes him when he says her name. \*\* She doesn't piece together a theological mystery like a learned theologian. She doesn't recall the prophecies in the Scripture like a model Sunday School student. She doesn't dazzle anyone with her grasp on the Apostles' Creed. She simply hears him speak her name...and she knows Jesus has returned. She hears a voice that only one person can have...and she knows God must have triumphed over death and the grave.

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Easter is God's appearing first not to the disciples who run the fastest, or who believe the quickest, but to the ones who are weeping, questioning, doubting, stuck in their confusion. Easter is God's surprise that we never know exactly where we might bump into the Lord next, but it's probably best to look around the dark corners of life.

This is what Mary's first Easter message, "I have seen the Lord," has done to people. It provides the courage to look death in the eye, to peer into the open tomb, to gather at scenes of tragedy and loss and pure darkness because we have faith that Christ, the Lord of life, is out and about.

In our tumultuous world, so much of our public discourse right now is filled with rancor and division. Day after day, news cycle after news cycle, we baptize our politics with religious fervor, while humanity falls short at truly being Christians. Horrendous things are happening. There is a darkness - and too many are standing by, allowing it - afraid to peer into the tomb of darkness, so that they can see the light.

But with Mary's message, we are now prepared to see God overturn the forces of darkness and evil. That's what understanding Jesus' true life is all about. The transformation from pain and grief to joy that Mary experiences may not be so quick for all of us, but the joy will come. The love of Jesus Christ will prevail over oppression, racism, bigotry and evil. Christ is risen, and we have faith that those who have cried, those who have died, will someday hear him call their name.

It is Easter morning. Mary has seen the Lord. There is no need for confusion and disbelief; to remain in the darkness. For the dawn is upon us. The light shines bright and we take comfort that we **know** how the story ends. AMEN