

## **This Is It**

**Rev. Brian R. Louis, Easter, 2024, Faith Presbyterian Church**

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

## Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look<sup>a</sup> into the tomb, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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,<sup>b</sup> if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,<sup>c</sup> "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> 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.' " <sup>18</sup> 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.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

He is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Happy Easter to you and all your family and friends. We gather in a spirit of joy and hope this morning, this most sacred day in our faith. For this is it, isn't it? This day is everything to us as Christians. This day is it.

What a road we have traveled this past month and a half. We have been on a solemn journey through Lent. We examined ourselves. We examined our faith. We took stock of our lives, and of our practices as Christians. Sometimes we were happy about what we observed, and other times we were sad and disappointed. Sometimes we were confused. Sometimes, perhaps we couldn't even look.

And then we traveled with the Lord those darkest of days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Saturday. We read the stories of the Last Supper, the sadness and grief and fear the Lord felt in the Garden of Gethsemane, the agony of the crucifixion, the sadness of death, and the cold and complete darkness of the tomb.

And from out of that darkness we read the story out of the Gospel of John of the resurrection. A story that shows that with God, all things are possible. That the love of God is always there, even though it doesn't seem like it sometimes. We revel in the

glorious mystery and triumph over death of Jesus our Savior. For us this day is joy, happiness, the culmination of a long, trying road.

Mary Magdalene did not feel glorious mystery or triumph at first that morning of the first day of the week. Before dawn, she felt panic and fear in the dark. She sees that the tomb is empty. She runs to Peter and John, and they come running to the tomb. They check things out, confused, surely, because John's gospel says that "as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead."

So the two apostles go home. What do they do then? Do they gather and ask where is the Lord? Did you take him? Did anyone take him? What is going on? Mary doesn't go back with them. She stays behind, weeping in sadness, wondering where her Lord is. She goes inside and sees the two angels sitting in the tomb, one where his head lay, the other where his feet were. She is in despair. She turns around and there is Jesus, but he is hidden from her at first. Why? What did he look like? Did he change shape and appearance completely from what he was as a human being since Mary didn't recognize him? What did his resurrection body look like at that moment with Mary? It is a mystery.

Why is Jesus hidden from her? Is it a metaphor for how she felt? That the grief and sorrow she felt was so profound that she couldn't see or feel God's presence?

Jesus the Christ appears in her vision of him as a gardener. She asks him sharply, where is her Lord? What did you do with him? Where did you take him? Out of that moment of despair and sadness, Jesus appears to her where this time she recognizes him. He tells her to go tell the apostles that he will be ascending to the father, who is also their father. Mary runs to the disciples and says simply, "I have seen the Lord"; and thus begins the stories of sightings of the Lord after his resurrection.

Isn't this the way God works so many times in our lives? We go through the darkness of a period of time, through financial difficulty, loss of relationships, death of loved ones, sickness, and on the other side, is light. On the other side is another birth, a resurrection of hope, of optimism. Out of the depths we cry to the Lord. Out of the depths, we cry out the way Mary Magdalene cried that morning. And then, in the remote depths of her despair, she sees the risen Lord! Isn't that the way for us so many times? If we look back on our lives, through the darkness, we see the light of the Lord? God's promise is there for us? And this ultimate promise of God is there on full display for us today. It is the

cornerstone of our faith, the resurrection, and the promise for us, for our resurrection into eternal fellowship with God.

This is it. The resurrection. Theologian Rowan Williams writes that the resurrection “is our theological starting point. Believing in the resurrection is believing that the new age has been inaugurated, the new world has begun.”<sup>1</sup>

The resurrection is the starting point to the new world we live in. Everything changes after Christ. The resurrection is the foundation for our lives, for our faith, for our faith in the world to come. Without the resurrection, we have nothing.

As Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” (1 Cor 15:13-14)

Without the resurrection we are not here.

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Sign and the Sacrifice: The Meaning of the Cross and Resurrection* (p. 62). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

As Williams writes, "You can't simply have a theology about Jesus which is about the Jesus who walked in Galilee and nothing more."<sup>2</sup> And later he writes, "That is why Christianity is not the Jesus of Nazareth Society – rather like the Alfred Lord Tennyson Society or some such thing, looking back to a great dead genius."<sup>3</sup> "Belief in the resurrection is what makes the Church more than just the Jesus of Nazareth Society."<sup>4</sup>

John Calvin writes that from out of the resurrection of Jesus comes "Our righteousness in the sight of God renewed and restored" and the "pledge of our future resurrection."<sup>5</sup>

Calvin states that "by rising again, [Jesus] became victorious over death, so the victory of our faith consists only in his resurrection."<sup>6</sup>

We are faced with everything today. The foundation of our religion, what we believe, we are confronted with it and faced with it today. We are faced with our faith today. This is it. The resurrection is it. The victory over the grave. As we read on in scripture from here, we read of the sightings of the Lord to his people. The appearance of Jesus to his

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Kindle Edition, 130.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 130.

disciples, who are gathered without Thomas, and with him. To Mary Magdalene. To the two men on the road to Emmaus. The mysterious incident that Paul relays in First Corinthians Chapter 15 of the risen Lord's appearance to more than 500, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote his famous letter. And we learn of the appearance of the Lord to him on the road to Damascus.

This risen Lord is the foundation of our life. As Paul attests and teaches: Through his death our sins are forgiven. Jesus was buried and rose on the third day. Our new life.

The new life and promise of a new world, starts today. This is it. Today. New life in Christ.

This is it.

He is Risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.