

The Face of Jesus  
John 20:1-18  
Easter Sunday Sermon  
April 9, 2023  
Rev. Paulette Mixon-Weller

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...  
My family and the good people of Shalimar Presbyterian Church would load into a bus and journey 20 minutes to the beach. There we would wait for the sun to rise while enjoying a simple sunrise service. You never knew what the weather would be like- sometimes in the 30s and raining and sometimes in the 60s and beautiful. But consistently we would celebrate that glorious first Easter when Mary saw the Lord.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...  
God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a RUACH -a wind/breath/spirit from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...  
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb to grieve. She came in darkness to honor the dead. She found that things were not as she'd expected, as she thought they should be. The stone had been removed from the tomb, like a door left open and the house empty. Where was Jesus? So she went to get help or to not be alone in this discovery. She went to Peter and John saying, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

The men ran to see the tomb and found it empty; they saw the linens that had been covering Jesus' body lying there; then returned to their homes, but Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;<sup>2</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, 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!"

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark... Jesus called "Mary." Her own name. Hearing her own name, Mary knew it was her Shepherd, her Teacher, her friend. Jesus had said to his followers, "The Shepherd calls his own sheep by name. The sheep follow him because they know his voice."

Mary definitely knew the sound of Jesus' voice.

Ponder this blessing:

**A Blessing from Jan Richardson called The Magdalene's Blessing:**

You hardly imagined standing here, everything you ever loved suddenly returned to you, looking you in the eye and calling your name.

And now you do not know how to abide this hole at the center of your chest, where a door slams shut and swings open at the same time, turning on the hinge of your aching and hopeful heart.

I tell you, this is not a banishment from the garden. This is an invitation, a choice, a threshold, a gate.

This is your life calling to you from a place you could never have dreamed, but now that you have glimpsed its edge, you cannot imagine choosing any other way.

So let tears come as anointing, a consecration, and then let them go.

Let this blessing gather itself around you.

Let it give you what you will need for this journey.

You will not remember the words— they do not matter.

All you need to remember is how it sounded when you stood in the place of death and heard the living call your name.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...

Mary found life where she thought she would find death. How is this different than Lazarus finding life? The Ascension is what makes it different.

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to 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.'"

**Ann Lewin wrote this poem:**

Do not cling  
Let me be bigger than your heart can hold  
Rise with me to a larger vision

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...

<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.

The Gospel of John is all about our response to Jesus, our response to a personal encounter with Jesus. "O Lord, you're beautiful, your face is all I seek. When your eyes are on this child, your grace abounds to me."

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...

Sometimes it still seems dark. So many awful things happen on a small scale and on a big scale. Sometimes there seems to be no hope, but then we remember that there only seems to be no hope- God has conquered death. God rolled that stone away. It didn't roll off on its own; it weighed a ton. God rolled the stone away.

**Easter Prayer by Janet Morley**

Be not afraid.  
When we are all despairing,  
When the world is full of grief,  
When we see no way ahead,  
And hope has gone away,

Roll back the stone  
Although we fear change,  
Although we are not ready,  
Although we'd rather weep and run away,

Roll back the stone

Because we're coming with Mary  
Because we hope where hope is vain,  
Because you call us from the grave and show us the way,

Roll back the stone

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...  
Today the first day of the week, if we are quiet and still, if we truly  
listen, above the noise, above the worries, above the chaos of life,  
above our tears, we can hear Jesus calling us by name, calling us to  
new life. Let that hope grow in you. Let that reality ground you in  
courage, peace and love so that your heart can soar and be free!

Listen

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...  
Something wonderful happened that changed everything. Amen.