

**Sunday, April 5, 2026**  
**Easter Day (Year A)**  
John 20.1-18  
*The Rev. Michael K. Fincher*

**“Showing Up”**

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
*The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!*

The account of Jesus’ resurrection we heard this morning is not quite like that in any other Gospel. While the account in each of the Gospels has its own nuances, Mathew, Mark, and Luke all have an angel announce to Mary Magdalene and whoever else happens to be with her (this varies by Gospel) that Jesus has been raised. End of story, they can move on. But here, in John’s Gospel, there is no such angelic revelation. The principal characters are essentially left to figure it out for themselves. In the process, there is a lot of frenetic activity: people running back and forth across greater Jerusalem, as well as popping in and out of the tomb. There is an element of mistaken identity. And there is a lot of emotion on display: confusion, bewilderment, sorrow, relief. And eventually, joy. This Gospel account of the resurrection borders on being a mystery or a detective story.

In John’s Gospel the details are revealed little by little. Mary Magdalene shows up at the tomb of her friend and teacher. Why she has come, we know not. Perhaps it was merely to grieve the loss of one so dear to her. Perhaps she recalled his words that on the third day after his death he would be raised to new life, and she is coming in hopes of witnessing his raising. Regardless of the reason, when Mary arrives, she finds the stone covering the entrance had been removed. Rather than investigate further, she immediately runs off to find Peter and “the other disciple,” generally presumed to be John. Peter and John go to the tomb to investigate. John, getting there first, merely looks into the tomb, not going in. All he can see is the linen burial wrappings lying on the floor. Puzzling. If someone had taken Jesus’ body, why would they remove the burial cloths? Keeping the body wrapped would have been easier to manage. Yet, John does not go in to see if there is anything else to be seen. To see if there is anything else that might shed light on what might have actually happened. Which, as we find out, there is. When Peter arrives, he enters the tomb and finds the burial wrappings that John saw. Refer to previous comments about the burial wrappings and questions about why they are still present. But now Peter also finds the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head, neatly rolled up and set apart. Ok, now we’re getting somewhere. If the body had been stolen, why would the grave robbers unwrap the body, but also, why would they have neatly rolled that one particular cloth and set it apart from the others? Surely, they would have just dropped it in the pile with the rest.

Now, in defense of Mary, Peter, and John, it does make sense that none of them seem to be thinking rationally and trying to methodically figure out what has happened. They are grieving the loss of Jesus. They are puzzled by the mysterious disappearance of Jesus’ body. Under such circumstances, it is incredibly hard to think rationally.

Next, John enters the tomb, sees the additional head covering, and we are told “he saw and believed.” With that, both he and Peter leave and return to their homes. Believed? Believed what? That Jesus’ body is missing? That’s kinda obvious. Believed that it had been stolen? Believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead as he had foretold? Perhaps John was able to put two and two together and come up with the correct answer. First, that Jesus had foretold that he would be killed, and then on the third day be raised from the dead. This was the third day. So maybe, just maybe . . . And the fact that the burial wrappings were still there seemed to point in that direction, assuming it unlikely that grave robbers would have unwrapped the body. It all seemed to make sense. Nothing more to be done here. At least from Peter and John’s perspective.

At this point, Mary re-enters the scene. Actually, entering the tomb for the first time. Only now there are two angels where there had been none mere moments before. She still thinks Jesus’ body has been taken. Despite asking her why she was weeping, the angels do not answer when she responds. She turns to leave and finds herself face-to-face with Jesus. Only she does not realize it is him. Yet. She thinks he is the gardener and reasonably assumes he was the one who removed the body. Only when he speaks, only when he calls her by name, “Mary!” is she able to recognize him. Only then does everything fall into place. Only then, in her openness to experiencing the Risen Lord, was she able to see the truth. Only then was she able to be open to what he needed her to do: to proclaim the truth of his resurrection.

In the tender concluding scene where Mary comes face-to-face with Jesus, the exchange between the two parallels the entirety of Jesus’ earthly ministry. When the Risen Jesus first greets Mary, he asks “Whom are you looking for?” The same question he asked his first would-be disciples three years before. In that question, inviting Mary to be a partner in proclaiming the Gospel. The Gospel that had been taken to the next level through the events of the last three days: his death and resurrection. Calling her by name, “Mary!” and her responding “Rabbouni!” illustrating his revelation of himself as the Good Shepherd: “I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10.14). The Shepherd who “lays down his life for [his] sheep” (Jn 10.11b).

And now, commissioning her to carry his message to the other disciples: that he is “ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” A message that his death and resurrection have changed things. That through his death and resurrection, all who follow him are made beloved children of God. Fulfilling the statement in the Prologue to John’s Gospel that “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” (Jn 1.12). A message of love. A message of inclusion. A message of hope. A message of light in the midst of darkness. A message of new life. A message that first began with Jesus’ resurrection and which continues in perpetuity with her proclamation, “I have seen the Lord.” Confirmation that what Jesus had taught, preached, and foretold, was and is true.

Throughout this account, none of the principal characters seem to have the whole picture. Each one observes bits of critical information about what happened. The way things unfold, they have to cooperatively piece it all together. To figure out for themselves what happened. None of the principal characters were expected to have the whole picture. Each—Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John—only needed to show up and to be open to the experience that unfolded before them. And even then, the full power of the Resurrection unfolded slowly. Little by little, as was needed in the moment. Giving each of the principal characters what they needed in the

moment. Allowing each of them to linger, to have the opportunity to fully absorb the magnitude of what had happened. And at the same time, pointing to the fact that the resurrection is most fully revealed and experienced in community.

In many ways, John's account of the resurrection—rather, of the revelation to the disciples regarding Jesus' resurrection—is an appropriate image for why we are here today. For why so many have come to this place on the day of Christ's resurrection.

We come, like Mary Magdalene, seeking . . . something. Seeking comfort and consolation in the midst of personal or societal woes; or both. Seeking answers to seemingly unanswerable questions. Seeking an encounter with the Resurrected One. Seeking assurance of forgiveness and new life that only the Resurrected One can provide. Perhaps a combination. Perhaps all the above. What we each seek is as unique as we each are. What we will find is, likewise, as unique as we each are. Just as what Peter found, what John found, what Mary found, was unique. Was what they needed. At least in the moment. But in the fullness of time, each ultimately receiving, absorbing, and making the message their own.

Like Mary and her compatriots at the tomb, we also live in troubling times. Perhaps different troubles weigh on us and our society than those experienced by Mary, Peter, and John. Perhaps many of the same as weighed on them and their fellow disciples. I won't even begin to try to list them. We each know our own personal concerns, our own personal burdens. And in our hyper-connected world, we are all generally aware of what is going on down the street, across our nation, and around the world. And we all have our own unique opinions and perspectives on whatever the topic of the current news cycle is.

All this to say that each of us have in our personal life moments and places of shadow and darkness. And we certainly live in a world that seems to be increasingly shrouded in shadow and darkness. The good news of this day and what we witness with Mary Magdalene at the tomb is that through his resurrection, Jesus overcomes the powers of sin and death, bringing forgiveness and new life. And in the process coming back into our lives and back into our world to bring light to the darkness. To bring love in place of hate. To bring hope in place of despair. To bring peace in place of war. To bring healing in place of illness and dis-ease.

Looking at the state of the world, sometimes even looking at the state of our personal lives, it is easy to ask, then where is the light, the love, the hope, the peace, the healing? Fair enough. But the example of Mary Magdalene, of Peter, and of John in today's Gospel show us that while the Risen Lord does make all of that possible, we have our own parts to play. We need to be willing, like Mary Magdalene, to show up at the tomb. Even in the face of grief, injustice, and despair. Perhaps, especially in the face of grief, injustice, and despair. We need to be willing, like Mary, Peter, and John, to work together to reveal the truth of the Risen One. We need to be open, like Mary Magdalene, to hear Christ call us by name. We need to be willing, like Mary Magdalene, to receive his commission to proclaim the truth of the Risen Christ. And most importantly, having experienced the meaning of resurrection in our own lives, we need to have the courage to boldly proclaim both in word and in action, "I have seen the Lord."

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
*The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!*