

Easter Sunday 2017

John 20:1-18

Video Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NWZ7bjNQXA>

No one saw it coming. No one. Early on the Sunday morning following the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, no one really expected what happened.

They should have. Jesus told them several times that he would suffer, be rejected by the religious leadership, be killed and rise after three days. So, why, when it happened did no one expect it?

John tells us Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early that morning, saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance and her conclusion = someone had taken the body. She didn't even think about the idea Jesus might have come back from the dead.

Worried and afraid, she ran to fetch the disciples.

Peter and John came running. When they reached the tomb, they looked in, saw only strips of cloth lying there and it was clear to them something was going on. The strips of cloth were still there so it didn't seem likely the body had been stolen, but they really didn't know what to think. So, they went back home. Leaving us with the impression that they certainly weren't expecting Jesus to rise from the dead either.

Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. When she looked into the tomb, two angels asked her why she was crying. I imagine these heavenly messengers having just come from the biggest party in heaven celebrating Jesus' victory over death, sent to illuminate the empty tomb so that Mary and the disciples can see that the "greatest thing ever" has just happened – Jesus is no longer dead and buried, he is risen.

But Mary doesn't see it. She looks into that tomb and continues weeping. So, they ask her, why are you crying? Apparently Mary is still convinced someone has taken the body.

That is until she turns around. She doesn't recognize Jesus standing there until he calls out her name. Why? Because she wasn't expecting a resurrection.

It isn't until Jesus calls her by name that Mary moves from grief to joy, from despair to hope, from death to resurrection. It was only when Jesus called out her name that she could see it was Jesus her Lord and in that moment – everything changed.

Have you ever been lost in a nightmare, the kind of dream in which something dangerous is chasing you and you can't get your feet to move, and you're wrapped in terror? Or maybe you're falling through the darkness, certain that you're going to die? And in your terror you hear someone in the distance, perhaps a spouse or a parent, calling you by name, calling you out of the nightmare into the warmth and security of your bed and the waking world? Have you ever had that experience?

I have, and I imagine that's how it was for Mary on that first Easter morning. Mary is lost in a nightmare of grief and death and despair, but Jesus calls her out of the darkness and into the light by calling her name. And in that moment, everything changes.

If Jesus is alive, then death has been defeated.

If Jesus is alive, we can be sure all of our sins are forgiven.

If Jesus is alive, then all things are possible.

If Jesus is alive, we can face each day with faith and confidence.

If Jesus is alive, we do not need to fear death because God's love is stronger than the grave.

The Good News we celebrate today is that Jesus is indeed alive and all of this is true! The resurrection of Jesus is the most pivotal moment in history.

When Mary hears her name, she turns. That's such a significant detail. It symbolizes so much more than just a physical movement; it points to something deeper, to an internal turning, to new direction in Mary's life. By calling her name, Jesus invites Mary to

follow him, to live resurrection life, and to go and tell others the good news.

This is more than just a story about Mary. This is our story. We are a people who have heard the resurrected Jesus call our name in baptism, empower us with the Holy Spirit, and send us out into the world to live resurrected lives in both simple and profound ways.

We live in a world that is drowning in darkness, death and despair. But today we celebrate that Christ is risen. Darkness gives way to light. Death has been swallowed up by life. Despair yields to hope. The risen One has called you by name, empowered you with the Holy Spirit, and sends YOU out into this world to live resurrection. What are you waiting for?