Lectionary C March 27, 2016 Easter Sunday Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana Pastor Roberta Meyer

Acts 10:34-43 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 John 20:1-18

The Good News of Jesus according to St. John the twentieth chapter.

C Thanks be to God!

John 20:1-18The Message (MSG)

20 ¹⁻² Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance. She ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, breathlessly panting, "They took the Master from the tomb. We don't know where they've put him."

³⁻¹⁰ Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter. Stooping to look in, he saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn't go in. Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself. Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. No one yet knew from the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. The disciples then went back home.

¹¹⁻¹³ But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she knelt to look into the tomb and saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus' body had been laid. They said to her, "Woman, why do you weep?"

¹³⁻¹⁴ "They took my Master," she said, "and I don't know where they put him." After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn't recognize him.

¹⁵ Jesus spoke to her, "Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?"

She, thinking that he was the gardener, said, "Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him."

¹⁶ Jesus said, "Mary."

Turning to face him, she said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" meaning "Teacher!"

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Don't cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God."

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went, telling the news to the disciples: "I saw the Master!" And she told them everything he said to her.

P This is good news for all of us!

C Thanks be to God!

An Easter Story of Shocking Surprises and Tons of Questions By Mary Magdalene

It was in a garden. I liked that. Jesus always loved to go to the garden to pray by himself. Being there in the beauty of nature I think made him feel close to God who he called "Abba, Father". So when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus got permission from Pilate to take his body and prepare it for burial, I was comforted when they found that never before used grave in a garden not far from where he died. They gathered all the supplies, "about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes, and took Jesus' body and, following the Jewish burial custom, wrapped it in linen with the spices." This worked out well because it was Sabbath preparation for the Jews and the tomb was convenient." A perfect place to lay Jesus to rest.

That was the worse day of my life. I was numb. I couldn't believe what had taken place. I was there at the foot of that horrible cross, you know, when he took his last breath. ""It is finished." Those words kept resonating in my head. "No, No, No!"

In that disoriented state, I found myself walking to his grave in the dark of the early morning on the day after Sabbath. I'm not sure why. I just had to be close to him. That didn't turn out quite like I expected. When I got there I was appalled. I "saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance." Really, haven't they done enough? Why couldn't they leave Jesus' dead body alone and let us mourn in peace?

[I] ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, breathlessly panting, "They took the Master from the tomb. We don't know where they've put him."

Peter and the other one, jumped up and ran full speed to the tomb. They were neck and neck, I tell you! Peter got there last. He walked past "Speedy" who was just standing there in a stupor, staring at that open tomb and that huge stone that someone had to have worked extremely hard to move. But there it was, open.

The first disciple to get there bent to look inside. There were the linens they used to wrapped Jesus' body, lying there but Jesus' body was gone. I think this follower of Jesus was afraid of what else or who else might be lurking in there. The disciple who Jesus loved didn't go in.

But Peter walked on in. He is the one that did things without thinking first. He was always impulsive. What if there were bandits in there waiting for us? But Peter was probably as numb as I was. He was already hurt to the core. Let 'em at him. Nothing else could make things any worse than they already were.

[Peter] observed the linen cloths lying there, and the kerchief used to cover [Jesus'] head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself. That was strange. It seemed if someone stole the body, they would have kept it wrapped up. And for sure they wouldn't have taken the time to fold that kerchief so neatly. Peter was trying to figure things out. That's when his companion finally "went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed." Believed that Jesus body was gone, that's for sure, and I could tell by the deep sigh that came from that worn out body that the truth was soaking in. Was it true? Was what Jesus had told us all really true?—that Jesus rose from the dead? Stunned and not knowing what else to do, the [two disciples] then went back home.

Not me. I just stood there outside the tomb weeping. I mean gut wrenching, howling sobs, so loud the whole world must have heard me. I didn't care. Jesus was dead. Jesus' body was gone. I just wanted to melt into my tears and be gone, too.

I don't know if I heard something or saw something but for some reason while I was crying and screaming I looked inside the tomb. Was I delirious? I rubbed my eyes. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, but there they were, "two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus' body had been laid. They said to me, "Woman, why do you weep?"

"What do you mean, why do I weep? Someone "took my Master...and I don't know where they put him."

That is when I turned and saw him. There was another guy in the tomb, I thought he must be the gardener. "Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?"

I was getting pretty angry at that point. I snapped, "Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him."

That is when I heard his voice. "Mary."

I thought I would never hear that voice again. "Mary."

It was Jesus! Standing there looking at me and calling my name!

"Rabboni! Teacher!"

I can't describe the feeling that came over my body at that moment. There was sheer joy, and relief, and disbelief, and belief all at the same time.

I must have instinctively fallen to his feet and grabbed hold of them. He told me not to cling to him. He said, ", for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God."

That's when I "Mary Magdalene, went, telling the news to the disciples: "I saw the Master!" And [I] told them everything he said to [me.]"

And that is what I have been doing ever since. Telling disciples, the Easter News about Jesus. I saw it written someplace. I, Mary Magdalene, am the first Christian preacher. Since that day my words ring out. "I saw the Master. He is risen from the dead!"

You know over the centuries I have noticed something about how others react to this Easter News. It is always a surprise. From that first Easter Day no one recognized Jesus right away. I mean it was Jesus standing right in front of me, but I didn't recognize him. It was Jesus, but somehow he was so different, I didn't recognize him. Impossible? I don't know. All I do know is that is how this Easter Jesus comes, unexpected, surprising.

And there is something else. Everyone recognizes this Easter resurrection news in their own way. It depends on our personalities, our situations, the ways we process things. Why I just told you about Peter. It took folded grave clothes to get him thinking, and even at that it still took some time. James, why he had been walking and talking to Jesus all day on the road to Emmaus, but it took seeing Jesus break bread to convince him. Thomas had to touch Jesus' wounds, and

the others in that Upper Room began to understand when they saw him eat. Me, I heard him call my name. I responded like one of his little lambs, whom the story says knows our shepherd when he calls us by name.

That is the message I am here to tell you today. We don't all have to discover Easter in the same way. Or at the same time. We will each experience our own mix of wild joy and major misgivings, and each ask our own questions.

That is what Easter is about, asking the question, "What just happen?" In fact, when resurrection happens, that is our natural gut response.

You could say Easter is a Question. It is not just a story from long ago, or a doctrine to learn. It is not an explanation or a picture to hold onto. No, there are two things for sure about the reaction God's children's have to Easter. First, never expect Jesus to be recognizable. Expect to be flabbergasted. And second, expect to be brimming with questions, not answers.

It is the Easter questions that brought the disciples running to the tomb and back to the Upper Room to mull over the reports of what had just happened. And those questions had them following Jesus down the road all the way to the Inn at Emmaus.

You could say Easter rises from a cradle of questions, beginning with a manger in Bethlehem. Each of us sees, hears, and touches Easter differently. Each time we hear a stammering report of Easter resurrection more questions are raised.

And the more questions, the more room for resurrection. The questions are the fire that ignites all of us who stumble upon Easter. And that is our witness to the world, to spread that living, blazing light with all its questions. Because when we come together with our questions, hope comes. When we see glimpses of new life in the midst of darkness and turmoil, our questions inflame into only one answer that is important. That answer is Love, God's Love for all of us.

Yes, I am including you, my disciples, as eyewitnesses, to this Easter mystery. You are written in my original story. You are all there with me at the tomb, experiencing this living story and all the questions that come with it. I know you. After all, it says in the scripture that I was there, Peter was there, and so was the disciple whom Jesus loved. That, my sweet friends, is you.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed.