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Bethany Presbyterian Church

Isaiah 65:17-25; John 20:1-18

April 20, 2025 – Easter Sunday 10:00am

***Isaiah 65:17-25***

***For I am about to create new heavens  and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
18But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight.
19I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it or the cry of distress.
20No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime, for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
21They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat, for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
23They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord – and their descendants as well.
24Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
25The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain,  says the Lord.***

***John 20:1-18***

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

***11But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, 12and 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. 13They 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.” 14When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus 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.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17Jesus 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.’ ” 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.***

“Is this it?”

Mary, who knew the ancient words from Isaiah, had just seen the Lord, who was dead and was alive. Is this it? Perhaps she asked herself. Is this what Isaiah was talking about? “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.” Seeing her Lord alive, and calling her name,, she might have wondered for only a moment if she was witnessing Isaiah’s words come to life.

Certainly she had never expected, on that dark mournful morning, to see anything this new! She came as soon as the Sabbath had ended, her first opportunity to come to be close to her teacher. She witnessed his terrible last days, saw him die at the hands of Pilate who just washed his hands of him; remembered the crowds shouting “Crucify him!” Quickly buried by Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, and Nicodemus who brought the spices for burial, so that Jesus could be laid to rest before the Sabbath. They buried him in a tomb in the garden and went away. Now it was morning on the third day, and Mary wanted to be near him. In the dark she approached the tomb but could see that the stone used to close the tomb had been moved. Before she could even investigate she ran off to tell the disciples assuming there was trouble from graverobbers. The men came in a strange race of their own, hurrying to see what Mary was talking about. Sure enough, inside the tomb there was no body, but strangely the linens were still there, and folded at that! So they saw and believed. Believed Mary, that something nefarious was going on. And they returned to their homes.

What a loss for Mary. Not only could she not imagine herself near her Lord, now she knew that his body wasn’t even in there. She wept. Looking into the tomb for herself, she found it as the men had said, only now there were two angels sitting at the head and foot of where Jesus’ body would have been. She must have been astounded when they spoke to her. “Woman, why are you weeping?” Maybe feeling like she was in some kind of a dream, these angels asking her a question, her sorrow now even deeper, she replied “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have laid him.” And then she turned around and saw a man – Jesus – but she didn’t recognize him. He asked her the same thing that the angels asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Assuming him to be the gardener, maybe she changed her mind about possible grave robbers. This gardener must have moved him.” “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

But then, curiously, this gardener, Jesus, said her name, “Mary.”

It probably hit her all at once – the body gone, linens remain, angels, and now her dear teacher, “Rabounni!” standing here in front of her! Is this it?! Is this the new thing Isaiah spoke of so long ago! She probably wanted to hug him, or hold him close, or take him by the hand and lead him to the rest of the disciples! Mary, having her own Easter moment!

Easter begins in the dark, moves through sorrow and confusion and despair, to finally recognition of the miracle when her name is called. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Do me a favor. If you’re comfortable, close your eyes and hear God say your own name to you. On 3:

(Isaiah 43), “ Do not fear, I have called you by name; you are mine. **2**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. **3**For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. **4**Because you are precious in my sight and honored and I love you.”

Easter happens with a moment so personal, that even our name becomes holy.

Imagine her delight! Glee! That’s the part of Easter that gets all of the Alleluia’s going, and the organ and brass! Yes, but not so fast, Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.”

Then Jesus who met her in darkness and despair, who acknowledged her tears, who called her by name, then gave her a command. “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*’*” 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. Mary Oliver would be proud – Mary was paying attention, was astounded and told about it.1

Mary, the first apostle. Mary, who began the day in the dark, with sorrow and confusion and weeping, experienced the joy of reunion, recognition, and resurrection, and set our story on its way by that first announcement to the disciples.

Writer Jan Richardson, says, “Easter starts in the shadows; resurrection begins in the place where it is difficult to perceive.”

Here is a blessing written by Jan. It’s called “THE MAGDALENE’S BLESSING For Easter Day”

“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 in 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 the tears come

as anointing, as 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.”

—Jan Richardson

from Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons

Thanks be to God, Christ is Risen!

He is Risen indeed!

Amen.