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 towards 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’ 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.

**Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene**

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look[\*](javascript:void(0);) 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 round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ 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,[\*](javascript:void(0);) ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). 17Jesus 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.” ’ 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.

Christ is risen! All things are new!

We celebrate Easter with fanfare. This morning we have our choir singing, guest soloists, guest acolytes, flowers. Many of you are likely wearing new clothes, new ties. And Easter is truly a time to celebrate the new. Yet too often we celebrate Easter in the same manner that we might celebrate a birthday, or an anniversary – as an annual festivity to commemorate an event that occurred in the past and that involved a single person. But Easter is much more than that. The early church met on Sundays *weekly* to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus; some met every day to celebrate. And indeed we should celebrate every day, because Easter is not it’s not about one single event in history that happened to a single man in a single place; the resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of a new reality, a reality that embraces all of humanity, a reality that is accessible to all people at all times and in all places.

Several years ago, I had a cinematic adventure when I saw the movie *Avatar* in 3-D. What an adventure! I sat with wife after the movie, as the credits were rolling, still wearing the 3-D glasses and wishing that I could just go back and live in Pandora. Imagine what it was like to follow Jesus in his earthly ministry in Palestine, to witness the miracles, to hear the teachings, to experience the thrill! They were experiencing something completely new and utterly amazing. It’s no wonder that Jesus drew such crowds and that the stories have been told for nearly two thousand years.

It began with Jesus’ birth when angels announced his arrival to common folk who needed words of hope. While the rulers were busy with their census, angelic choirs were proclaiming Jesus’ birth to the lowly shepherds. Jesus lived a life of no special privilege or entitlement, and his ministry focused on those who struggled the most. His words were encouraging (“Blessed are the poor…the meek…those who mourn…those who yearn for righteousness”). Jesus shattered the norms of the old order: Women, who were generally marginalized in Jewish society, were active supporters of his ministry; Jesus took his mission to Samaria, to a people despised by the Jews, and he taught lessons were given about GOOD Samaritans; Jesus refused to let religious regulations pertaining to the Sabbath day dampen his compassion, and many were healed despite such taboos. Jesus not only offered forgiveness to “sinners”; he shared meals with them.

What stands out in most people’s minds today when we consider Jesus’ ministry was its miraculous nature. People saw things that you just don’t see every day. The blind were made to see. The lame were made to walk. People with leprosy (considered untouchable by the purist religious authorities) were touched and healed. And even the dead were raised. To witness the compassionate healing ministry of Jesus would have inspired so many disciples to follow him, to have faith in him. His followers would have surely believed that the whole world had changed. They would have had to suspend their own idea of what was normal in light of the amazing things that Jesus was doing.

Meanwhile, those who preferred the Kingdom of Man feared Jesus and received him with indignation. It’s not that they didn’t see the wondrous things Jesus was doing; it’s just that they liked the way their world operated. Those who were healthy and wealthy and powerful had no need for his healing or miracles, and would have cared less about him. But when they saw that Jesus’ teaching threatened their power base and that Jesus had mass appeal, they needed to do away with him. It’s no coincidence that leaders started planning ways to kill Jesus after Lazarus was raised from the dead – because if death no longer appeared as a threat to people, those with the power to kill were rendered powerless. And when Jesus walked into the Temple and overturned the money tables, which threatened to kill the leaders’ source of income, IT WOULD ONLY BE A MATTER OF DAYS BEFORE JESUS WOULD BE KILLED.

And so the new reality, the new order that Jesus was invoking, caused tension and division in the world. The old order is one that is indeed obsessed with death – what motivates its inhabitants is, consciously or unconsciously, their own terminality. Because they accept death, life is spent in the ruthless pursuit of resources that prolong life as much as possible. People compete with one another in order to make their lives longer or more pleasant before going to the grave. The old order looks upon the miracles of Jesus as “exaggeration” or “allegory” but not as evidence of a new reality. Those who saw the amazing things Jesus did in conjunction with his teachings of love and compassion embraced a new ideal, believing that God was both compassionate and capable of everything, including resurrecting the dead! Their perspective radically shifted from one consumed with the grim prospect of death to the hope of everlasting life, from the temporal to the eternal!

In its attempt to eradicate this new movement that no longer served human masters but placed its hope and fidelity with Jesus, the adherents to the old order killed Jesus. And they didn’t simply assassinate him; they did all that they could to discredit him. They exposed his apparent weakness and “inability” to save himself. They mocked and beat and spat upon him. Then they crucified him.

The old order has a strong pull upon us, perhaps because it’s exactly what most of us are used to in our lives. We live our lives never expecting to see miracles, never daring to hope that the power of death could ever be defeated. That strong pull back to the old way of looking at things was evident even among the closest disciples of Jesus. Mary Magdalene went to Jesus’ tomb that Easter morning fully expecting to find a corpse. Even when she sees that the stone has been moved from the entrance, she runs to the disciples to announce, “we don’t know where they have taken him (i.e. the corpse of Jesus).” Two angels (!) ask her why she’s crying, and she again asks where Jesus’ body has been taken. Jesus himself speaks to her, and again she inquires about the location of the corpse. Despite all that she has witnessed during Jesus’ lifetime, despite the fact that her Lord had healed her of seven afflictions, Mary has gone back to her old way of thinking, to believing that death claims everything and there is no reason for hope.

Until Jesus calls her by name. “Mary.” There could not have been any music more beautiful to ears than to hear Jesus speak her name outside of the tomb. And there is no greater joy imaginable than for us too to hear Jesus’ voice speak our names, giving us the assurance that God’s love conquers the grave, that we are invited into God’s presence for eternity, and that nothing can prevent God from saving those He loves.

The Resurrection demonstrates the supremacy of the new order over the old; God’s kingdom is real and eternal. We need no longer be enslaved to fear and conflict. Rather our lives need only be consumed with indescribable joy for the salvation that God has wrought for us through the cross. Death does not have the last word; God does.

Many still cling to the old, believing that joy in this life is the most they can ever hope for. But limited hope is no hope at all. God has no limits, and he offers us hope without limits. Let our lives be expressions of that hope, the hope that is infinite. May our Easter celebration be perpetual, eternal as our lives are eternal. And may we serve our Lord Jesus Christ by sharing that hope and that joy with all.