

04.05.26 ~ Easter Sunday
“Resurrection—Roots, Trunk, & Leaves”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words to Ponder

John 20:1-10 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 944

The Resurrection

¹ Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. ² She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.

⁴ They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. ⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed — ⁹ for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then they went home.

Leader: These Are Words of Mystery!

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Resurrection

John 20:11-18 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 944

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. ¹² She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. ¹⁵ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” ¹⁶ “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”). ¹⁷ “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

Leader: These Are Words of Resurrection!

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we are ecstatic for the news that Christ is risen from the grave! We too go to the tomb surprised and unsure of its emptiness after experiencing his crucifixion and burial. We celebrate today though knowing that we are forgiven; by his stripes we are healed. There is a resurrection! We seek your presence as we worship you today and every Sunday! Thank you for the liberty to gather in fellowship and study openly when so many Christians around the world do so in secret. As we remember you in these unsettled times, let us forgive others as you forgive us and let us pray for peace around the world. Help us to feel your love and assurance as we hear this blessed account and empower us to share it with others who don't know you. Lord, speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Happy Easter! Alleluia! He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed –
 Hallelujah! Lent is over; we've been in reflective study for forty (40) days, had a lovely Disciples' Lunch together, communion representing Christ's body and blood in the bread and juice, then journeyed to the cross through the Gospel of John in Music and Scripture, remembering the deep relationship between Father God and Son. We recall how Jesus was deserted by his disciples, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter three times, tortured, arrested and tried before Pilate and Herod, then killed on the cross and buried in a tomb. Still, he forgave his accusers. And today, after so much sadness, we can't imagine how Mary of Magdala, Peter, and John must have felt when his body was gone from the tomb!

First, I want to say thank you to Roudaina, David, Beth, Charles, Andrew, Bill, and several members of the Vietnamese Gospel Baptist Church for coming on Good Friday to present and participate in the journey to the cross just described. It was good fellowship and a creative experiential re-telling. Also, thank you to those who purchased lilies and tulips to enhance our Sanctuary worship experience. Remember to take them home with you or to someone else who needs a lift.

Today, we celebrate fully Jesus' resurrection and amazing love for us. During Lent, we studied his teachings, forgiveness, miracles of restoration, and his relationship with his father, his disciples, and ourselves. We prayed for our world events, the war in the Middle East, for ourselves and our loved ones. Perhaps you fasted or added one new spiritual practice. However, forty days of preparation did not really prepare us at all for what happened on Friday. No pondering, prophecy, or even Jesus' teaching could prepare the women, his mother, the disciples or even ourselves for a resurrection with an empty tomb! Can you imagine the confusion that morning? After Mary Magdalene reported that Jesus' body was missing, and she feared the worst that it had been stolen to distort his message, she ran to tell the closest disciples. The writer John specifies Mary Magdalene perhaps because of her indebtedness to Jesus for her healing and life transformation; he does not mention the other women the synoptic gospel writers do, but we know that there were at least three. She was not the only witness but was the one who delivered the mysterious news! Yes, a woman.

The beloved disciple, John, and Peter ran to the tomb to see for themselves this incredible situation. Peter, who would carry on Jesus' work and message, could not have imagined the notion of God interrupting the dying-burial process. But as he personally saw the grave clothes so carefully folded and not strewn haphazardly on the stone ledge where Jesus' body had been, John believed no theft had occurred and that Jesus rose carefully and intentionally from this grave as he and the prophets said he would. For you detective story lovers, one commentary says John saw God's "fingerprints" all over the tomb.

Joseph of Arimathea and our friend Nicodemus made arrangements to use Joseph's new tomb; they gathered 75-100 pounds of myrrh, aloes, and spices to anoint his body. There was no embalming or mumification done for Hebrews, per their beliefs; that was more of an Egyptian burial custom. Even those closest to Jesus didn't yet understand the Scriptures or Jesus' teachings that he must rise from the dead. But after seeing him gone, John did believe more deeply all he had learned, so Peter and John left again quickly (*in some translations*) to tell the others this incredible news! The resurrection itself was still a bit of a mystery that will be revealed in the weeks of Jesus' appearances during Eastertide.

After they left, Mary stayed there at the tomb in the garden nearby weeping for her friend and savior; she was pondering this mystery and grieving her loss when two angels or messengers from God appeared and asked why she wept. One was where Jesus' head had been and one was at his feet, almost like guardians. She explained she wept in sadness and fear of not knowing where his body had been taken. Before they could answer her, another figure appeared. She didn't recognize him as Jesus and assumed he was the gardener until he gently and intimately called her name, "*Mary.*" Her ears and eyes were opened as she realized it was Jesus; he was still her Lord, alive or dead. "*Rabboni!*" she called out and ran to embrace him. He gently rebuffed her saying, "*do not touch me for I have not yet ascended to my Father in heaven.*" That explained God's interruption of the dying-burial process and that Mary nor Peter must interfere with God's will. Jesus instructed her to go and tell the brothers that he was in the process of ascending. They would see him later and

those appearances would anchor their faith and make them eyewitnesses to the resurrection!

We too are skeptical believers sometimes like disciples. But when there are miracles in front of our eyes, we surely proclaim God's goodness and mercy. We shout for joy our beliefs and understandings of faith. These mysterious events secure and anchor our faith; we do not question them even if we do not fully understand. Jesus and the Trinity are the roots of our faith tree. **Jesus and today's resurrection** are the very foundations of our faith in God; the Holy Spirit is our Advocate and counselor and first appears to the disciples at Pentecost (50 days from today). Our tree trunk could be the life and short ministry of Christ as expressed through the Scriptures, which explain his incarnational purpose in words that we can rely on and partially understand. If we read and study them, those words of Scripture (the prophets, the Old and New Testaments) form rings of truth, growth, and stability like the rings of a tree trunk's growth pattern. Our spiritual practices and disciplines support the trunk of our faith, like fertilizer, nourishing and strengthening the tree. Branches form out of this trunk to reach beyond ourselves. These branches could be missions, testimonies, or acts of agape love; today, these branches are us acting like Mary Magdalene, running from the empty tomb to spread the news, "He is Risen!" Leaves are the new lives born and changed through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. So, today and every day, we welcome Mary Magdalene's good news: "I have seen the Lord!" We know, celebrate, and sing that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave!

Now on Good Friday, we had communion at the table together as fellowship and disciples. There Jesus reminded them what was to come. Today, however, it is the first Sunday of the month, so we observe communion again as is our custom to remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross, but also to recall that he is **no longer on that cross!** He has risen! He is now at the right hand of Father God, and through this ordinance of remembrance, we recommit our faith, knowing that Jesus allowed his body to be broken and scourged for you and for me as the new covenant with God. So, as we eat the wafer and drink the juice, give thanks for Jesus, his risen body, his amazing love and mercy, our personal and transformed relationships, and this day of halleluiahs! Amen! ||

Please pray with me: Dear Jesus, we love you. We thank you for your sacrifice and forgiveness. You alone are our source, foundation, and light. Help us to be grounded in the roots of your incarnation and resurrection, nourished and strong like the trunk of our faith tree; give us courage to branch out to spread your word, grace, love, and mercy. Help us to share the fragrance of Christ, growing buds, flowers, and lush leaves that spread your salvation globally. May we become Easter people, living in the joy of being saved, relying on you, our Savior, rising above struggles, and spreading peace and hope. We ask you, Lord, to bless these elements of communion as we receive them in the holy name of Jesus, Amen.