

John 20:1-18    Easter    Pastor Bill Uetrict

Those of you who have heard me preach know that I have some patterns in my messaging, that I repeat some lines often. I use one line that I am probably best known for. Do any of you want to guess what that is? Yes, that's right! "It's not about you!"

And most of the time, that is the right message. It is! Life's meaning is not about you—your ethnic background, your race, your religious label, your political persuasion, your family name. Your worth as a human being is not about you--your accomplishment, your achievement, your morality, your hard work, your income, your success or your failure. Contrary to what many of you think, many comments from people, their saying "hello" to you or not saying "hello" to you, their coldness or warmth toward you, their choosing you or not choosing you—many of these things are really not about you. And believe it or not, I often don't have you in mind when I am creating my sermons, contrary to what some of you think. I am glad that you think that I address your situation, but most of the time, when I write my sermons, I am not thinking about you and your situation.

But today is an exception. This sermon is all about you. It's designed for you. I had you in mind when I wrote it. For today, forget my past advice, the story and reality of resurrection are all about you.

In our gospel reading for today, we have three types of you, three disciples who have distinct responses to the reality of an empty tomb. I suppose John could have provided us more responses, more images of what it means to live by faith in light of death and the initial data of a missing body. But I suspect that we might find ourselves in one of the three responses.

We start with Mary Magdalene. It was on the first day of the week—Sunday morning—when she came to the tomb, *while it was still dark*. Like Nicodemus before her, she is not yet in the light. Some of you aren't yet in the light. Some of you don't quite yet get this story. Some of you are a little bit interested, have had a little bit of an

introduction. Some of you are here because that is just what you do on Easter. I mean, the family expects it. For some, it's just culturally appropriate. And that is okay. Being in the dark is not bad thing. Heck, what sense does the light make if you don't know the darkness?

Besides, you are in good company. You are with Mary Magdalene. Now I know, she is not just culturally interested or responding to family expectations. She's been really close with Jesus. This Jesus thing has been part and parcel of her life. He's been at the center of her life. Yet still, she has no idea what resurrection means. She's coming to the tomb to pay her respects to the dead, to mourn the loss of a very good friend. She's coming there with death on her mind. I mean, why else would you go to the cemetery? You go to the cemetery to visit the dead. It's why you would go. Oh, some of you say, you don't go there. Yes. There are many of us who would rather not visit death. One of the privileges of modern life is that we can stay away from the cemetery for a long time—or so we think. We may not visit it, but it's still visiting us. And before you know it, it's running the show. It's why so many of us are angry and bitter, why so many of us hold on to all this stuff out of the past. Death visits us. We don't deal with it directly, and it bites us in the you-know-where.

Mary Magdalene *goes* to the cemetery. She confronts death, but what she finds when she gets there is a stone that has been rolled away from the tomb. And what does she think? Not that Jesus has been raised. Why would she think that? You go to the cemetery to visit dead bodies. So Mary thinks that someone has stolen the body of her friend Jesus, which only makes her grief worse. She runs then to Peter and the *beloved disciple*, to tell them the news that there is no body in the grave. These two men, typical males that they are, enter into a little competition. They run to the tomb. Peter, who most people think is the big wig, but maybe the writer of the gospel of John doesn't think so, loses the race. The beloved disciple gets there first.

This beloved disciple looks into the tomb and sees the cloths that were put on Jesus' dead body lying there. Peter then arrives. He looks

in, sees the cloths, and enters the tomb first. Some of us just need to be first. Some of us just need to get the info first. It makes us feel important. Even if we lose the race, we still need to assert ourselves.

Interestingly, John tells us nothing about Peter's response to the empty grave and the presence of grave cloths. Perhaps Peter is just uncertain about the whole thing. Many of you are uncertain. Many of you don't know what to make of all of this faith stuff. Sometimes it all seems a little weird. Sometimes it just feels out of touch with reality. Sometimes death (life's toughness) has visited you, and it has hurt you too deeply. You're uncertain. That's okay. Many folks are uncertain. Frankly, being uncertain is better than being too sure of yourself. The people who are too doggone sure of themselves are a pain to have around, and frankly, not always too honest.

Now regarding the beloved disciple, we are told that he believed. He looked at the grave cloths lying there and he believed. I don't know what he believed. Maybe he believed Mary's message to him that Jesus' body wasn't there. Or maybe he believed that Jesus had somehow had been raised. I don't know. The gospel writer John obviously loves this character. Six times he tells us that this unnamed disciple is "the one whom Jesus loves." I can't say this for sure. But I have to wonder if this character is not the way John got you and me into the story. Maybe the beloved unnamed disciple is you. Maybe this character is all about you. Maybe you are the one whom Jesus loves.

Maybe you are the one who arrives at the tomb and believes. Believing is a good thing. You just want to trust that death doesn't speak the final word. Now interestingly enough, though, you and the other guy, Peter, who seems a bit uncertain, don't stick around too long at the tomb. Much to my surprise, you return right away to your home. A little odd to me, in light of the fact that either a body is missing or it has been raised from the dead! But who knows? Maybe the big game is on the television or you promised your spouse that you were going to clean the bathroom! I don't know, but you head back home.

Sometimes you just need to get back to what you know, what is routine. Sometimes you don't grasp the significance of it all.

Mary, though, she hangs around. Tragedy is what she has experienced. And the grief is too piercing. She weeps outside of the tomb. Jesus is dead; his body must have been stolen. How can it get any worse? You've been there. You know what that's like. And then all of a sudden, the grave cloths become angels who proceed to ask Mary why she's weeping. "Duh," she says, "I am weeping because they have stolen my Lord's body." And I don't know where it is." And when she said this, a man spoke to her, asking the same thing that the angels did: "Why are you weeping?" And then this man asks: "For whom are you looking?"

Mary responds, thinking that this man is the gardener, "Sir, if you have moved the body of Jesus, tell me where you have placed it." And then Jesus said to her, "Mary." He called her name. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep by name. "Mary!"

(The following song was then sung.)

"Hush! Hush! Somebody's calling my name. Hush! Hush! Somebody's calling my name yame, yame. Hush! Hush! Somebody's calling my name. Oh mah Lawd. Oh mah Lawdie, what shall I do?"

"Sounds like Jesus. Somebody's calling my name. Sounds like Jesus. Somebody's calling my name, yame, yame. Sound like Jesus. Somebody's calling my name. Oh mah Lawd. Oh mah Lawdie, what shall I do."

"I'm so glad. Trouble don't last always. I'm so glad. Trouble don't last always. Yea. Yea. Yea. I'm so glad. Trouble don't last always. Oh mah Lawd, oh mah Lawdie, what shall I do?"

Jesus called her name. And Mary, she got it. Hush! Hush! He's calling your name. Micah. Cama. Barb. Lance. Jeremy. Tara. Bert. He's calling your name. He knows your name. This day is all about you. You who are uncertain. You who don't think too much about all of this stuff; you who are just too busy with the rest of life. You who are deeply entrenched in life's tragedy. You who arrive in the dark. You

who believe but don't hang around too long. You who don't even know what questions to ask. You whose tears flow continuously. This day is for you. Luke puts it this way, "Jesus is Lord of all."

Easter is about resurrection. And resurrection is about new life. And new life is what is yours today.

Hush! Somebody's calling your name. That somebody is God. He's showing up to say, as Jesus said two weeks ago, "Lazarus, Betty, Emily, Deb, Mark, Tyler, Mary, David, Jennifer: come out." It isn't all about death. It's about life. Life is calling every one of your names!