

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

April 20, 2025 (The Resurrection of Our Lord)
John 20:1-28

There's something I want you to see.

(Show video "The Risen Way")

In the gospel for Easter Sunday, there's a lot of running going on. Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John, Peter ran back, and John ran faster. Mary Magdalene ran FROM the empty tomb, and Peter and John ran TO it.

ALL of them were LOOKING for Jesus, but NOT where Jesus actually WAS. The covering over their HEARTS, the shroud of fear and doubt and grief KEPT them from SEEING Jesus.

Mary went TO the tomb that morning expecting Jesus to STILL BE IN there. Peter and John went CONFUSED AND QUESTIONING. All 3 MIGHT have, for a MOMENT, CONSIDERED the idea that Jesus COULD be RAISED from the dead, but all they SAW was an empty tomb.

If we were to STOP the story right THERE, at the empty tomb, it's still NOT REALLY EASTER. Not YET, because in the end, an EMPTY TOMB is just EMPTY; it doesn't MEAN all that much. An empty tomb is STILL a TOMB, and EMPTINESS doesn't bear that much hope. It's STILL a COLD place, a place for the DEAD.

And you can SEE that in Mary Magdalene's response. Two angels appear to Mary and say, "Woman, why are you weeping?" But she doesn't REALIZE that they're angels. Jesus HIMSELF appears to her, and again says "Woman, why are you weeping?" But she STILL can't SEE the person RIGHT in FRONT of her. She assumes he's the gardener.

Now HOLD ON. JESUS is STANDING in front of her, and she doesn't RECOGNIZE him? The open tomb, the grave wrappings, the angels, and now Jesus HIMSELF — no person has EVER had as much evidence of the resurrection as Mary did, and STILL, she JUST CAN'T SEE it.

You see, there's a BIG difference between an empty tomb and a RESURRECTION. It's the difference between "Woman, why are you weeping?" and "Mary!" To address her ONLY as "woman" is COLD, like the STONE of that TOMB. But Jesus hasn't come THIS far, to LEAVE us in the TOMB. It isn't only the resurrection of HIS life; it's the resurrection of OUR lives!

So, Jesus does one MORE thing — he looks into her eyes and says, "Mary!"

And FINALLY, it's EASTER!

With the call of her name, the fog clears and she can now SEE that the Son of God has RISEN. In the warmth of HIS LIGHT, the light of the resurrection, she can see CLEARLY that her Lord and Savior has been raised from the dead. Her faith is restored. His promises were TRUE. Her FAITH and her LIFE DO MEAN something.

Easter isn't JUST the empty TOMB; it's ENCOUNTERING the LIVING GOD, it's HEARING him speak your NAME. It's not just KNOWING that he's raised; it's BEING KNOWN.

There at the tomb, Peter and John met Jesus too, but THEIR experience was more subtle — it was in their HEARTS. In the days to come, Jesus would MEET and SPEAK to ALL of his disciples, calling EACH ONE by NAME.

Easter isn't just hearing ABOUT the resurrection, or like Mary, even SEEING it for YOURSELF; it's MEETING Jesus, it's HEARING his VOICE, like Mary did — the voice of Jesus, calling YOU OUT of the DARKNESS, out of your OWN tomb, into HIS GLORIOUS light, calling you to YOUR resurrection.

He calls you by NAME. He SEES you. He KNOWS you. Christ was there when God KNIT your together in your mother's womb. He KNOWS all your thoughts and fears, all your doubts and failings

before YOU do. He numbers the hairs on your head. And LOVES you, not in SPITE of your flaws, but BECAUSE of them, loves you COMPLETELY and UNCONDITIONALLY. YOU ARE KNOWN.

A resurrection like THAT, HEARING him call you by NAME, it CHANGES EVERYTHING. It changes life, and it changes death. It changes how we mourn AND how we hope, how we endure and how we live. It CHANGES EACH and EVERY DAY of our lives.

This is the very CENTER of our faith, the LENS that brings everything else into focus. The resurrection is the ONE thing that GIVES life meaning and purpose, for BY it, we KNOW that we have a LIVING and ACTIVE God. Death has lost its sting. Jesus DESTROYED the POWER of death. This is the core belief that all Christians share.

Now THAT is something to get excited about. This is why we CELEBRATE EASTER, because our Lord is risen and is HERE WITH us.

So, YES, THIS is a day to RUN. This is a day to get EXCITED. This is a day to SHOUT!

People of God, let me hear you! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!