

“Whom are you looking for this Resurrection Sunday?” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
April 16, 2017 Easter Sunday  
John 20:1-18

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

The various players in the drama I just read react differently to the events at Jesus' tomb. After hearing from Mary that **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him,”** Peter runs to the tomb behind the other disciple. Peter enters the tomb, observes the grave cloths, and then leaves, just leaves; returns to his home. The other disciple went into the tomb and discovers something. The text says **he saw and believed**. Both the disciples leave the garden. Only Mary stays in the garden weeping.

Today, let's spend a little time with Mary, the one who stayed in the garden, and as a result, was the first person to meet the risen Christ.

Who is this Mary? This Mary is Mary Magdalene, one of the women who travelled with Jesus and supported him and his disciples financially. She was present at the crucifixion and at Jesus' resurrection as we read today. In the four Gospels, she is mentioned at least 12 times, more than many of the disciples. Mary was a follower of Jesus.

Mary said to the disciples: **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”** Did Mary jump to a conclusion – an unfounded conclusion? Mary did not look into the tomb to see if Jesus' body was still there. There are other possibilities besides the body being stolen. But Mary saw the stone rolled away, assumed that the body had been stolen, and ran to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple.

There are lots of assuming people in this world. They hear about Jesus, but assume what they hear is not true. They never examine the facts or try to understand what is said to them. They never walk into the tomb to see if the body is gone. It's easier for them to make assumptions than to study and come to a conclusion based on facts.

How many of you have read ***The Case for Christ*** by Lee Strobel? I understand a movie based on the book opened in theaters last week. Lee Strobel, an investigative journalist, didn't believe that the story about Jesus was true. Using his investigative skills, he set out to disprove Christianity. He “walked into the tomb.” He asked questions and gathered facts and evidence that in the end changed his perception of Jesus. He had his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and came to faith.

After the disciples left the garden, Mary finally walked into the tomb. Her encounter with the two angels she saw there is quite uncommon. She is one of the few people in the Bible not startled by seeing angels. Perhaps, it was her deep grief. The author of John makes sure we understand that Mary is grieving. Her weeping is mentioned no less than four times in four verses. The angels honored her grief. They did not say, “do not be afraid,” but asked her why she was weeping. Mary replied, **I do not know where they have laid him.”**

Mary leaves the tomb and encounters Jesus, whom she mistakes for the gardener. She is still blinded by her preoccupation with her conclusion that the body was stolen. Jesus asks Mary

**“Whom are you looking for?”** Mary was looking for Jesus yet could not see him right in front of her!

How often does our preoccupation with life keep us from seeing God at work in our lives? How often do you and I have a preconceived notion like the body has been stolen leaving us blinded to other possibilities?

Jesus’ question - **“Whom are you looking for?”** - is a great question for all of us to answer this Easter Day. You may want to find Jesus, but something is blocking you. Perhaps you have been hurt or insulted by someone who called themselves a Christian. Perhaps it’s fear or the inability to trust. You’ve seen the joy of Jesus on others’ faces, yet you don’t think you can ever trust Jesus. Yet, you keep looking. I pray that today you find Jesus.

#### PAUSE

Let’s go on with the story. How did Mary finally recognize Jesus? He called her by name. She hadn’t been able to see him until she heard him call her name. Like the sheep that knows the shepherd’s voice, Mary recognized Jesus’ voice. Isn’t that often the case for us. We look and look, yet we never see Jesus. Then we stop looking and in the quiet we hear Jesus calling us. We then hear Jesus call our name and we recognize the shepherd’s voice

Jesus tells Mary that he is **‘ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’** Jesus invites Mary into the same relationship he has with God. This is a statement of identification. Jesus’ departure to the Father and subsequently sending the Spirit will enable his disciples then and his disciples now (that’s us) to have a similar relationship to God.

Mary was the first person to encounter the risen Christ. She joyfully proclaimed to the disciples. **‘I have seen the Lord.’** Her claim is based on her experience and encounter with Jesus. Mary moved from sadness to believing to knowing that Jesus was alive, was raised from the dead. Her statement is simultaneously an announcement about what she saw and a statement of belief in her promise of future life with Jesus and with God. We celebrate this Sunday, Resurrection Sunday, because each of us has that same promise of a future life with Jesus and with God. And that’s reason to celebrate!

Where do you fit into today’s story? Are you still wondering if someone stole the body and all this stuff about Jesus is so much poppycock? Have you seen, but still are uncertain if you can trust what you saw? Are you someone who has heard Jesus call your name and have become a child of God? Are you someone who, like Mary, joyfully proclaims, **‘I have seen the Lord’?**

**Whom are you looking for** this Resurrection Sunday?” What answer will you give Jesus? He’s asking you today.