

## **Easter Sunday**

**April 5, 2026 • 10:30am**

**Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA**

### **The Rev. Lex Breckinridge**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

You know what the first words Jesus speaks in John's gospel are? I'll give you some hints. John the Baptist has pointed out Jesus to two of his friends and they've begun to trail Jesus around to see what he's up to.

Jesus finally notices these two guys following him and he turns to them and says, anybody want to take a guess? What are you looking for? The first words Jesus speaks are to two curious seekers and he invites them to put into words something that's evidently been stirring in their hearts but that they can't quite give voice to. We know that because the two strangers, who turned out to be Andrew and Simon Peter, answer Jesus's question with a question of their own. Rabbi, they say, where are you staying? And then Jesus says, come and see.

You notice he doesn't provide them with information. He doesn't say, I'm staying with my cousin John at 75 Jericho Road, Jerusalem 70115. He doesn't give them information.

He instead invites them into an experience. Come and see, he says, and they stay with him all that day until four in the afternoon, John tells us. Now this story of the calling of the first two disciples is the end of the beginning of John's gospel and now this morning we fast forward to the beginning of the end of John's gospel.

Like the beginning, it's also a story about people searching. In this case it's Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus's friends who's doing the searching. Mary has come to Jesus's tomb to grieve his death, but when she arrives she finds something strange.

The stone has been removed from the entrance, and when she tells Simon Peter, he runs and reports that Jesus's body has been removed. Simon Peter and his friends confirm that Jesus's body is gone, but they don't know what to make of it, so they leave Mary Magdalene weeping next to an empty tomb, and then an interesting thing happens. Mary, the seeker with the broken heart, looks inside the tomb and sees something very strange.

Two angels, and they ask why she's weeping, and she says, because they've taken my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him. She then turns and sees another figure standing there, and he asks her the same question, why are you weeping? And then another familiar question, what are you looking for? And then comes the moment of recognition. The man whom she had supposed to be the gardener speaks her name, Mary, Mary, and in an instant she recognizes him.

It's when he calls her name Mary, Mary. Interesting, isn't it, that Jesus doesn't respond to her request for information. When she says, where have they taken him? He doesn't say, oh Mary don't you recognize me? They haven't taken me anywhere, I'm right here.

That would be information. Instead he simply calls her by name. In hearing Jesus speak her name, she experiences his presence.

She doesn't get information, she gets the experience of Jesus's real presence. Now let's step back for just a minute and look where this is taking place. It's all happening in a garden.

And what's happening? The one who Mary has first imagined to be the gardener is bringing new life, he's bringing a new world, he's bringing a new creation into being. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we're told this about the divine word made flesh in Jesus. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light to all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. In the first

creation story, Adam and Eve have to leave the garden because they've made the fundamental mistake of putting themselves in God's place.

You remember that wily crafty serpent who tells them: go ahead eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then you will be like God. Well not so much. And ever since human beings have been searching, searching for that way back to the garden, that way back to deep and full connection to the divine source of life.

I mean isn't that what Andrew and Simon were searching for when they approached Jesus? Jesus says, what are you looking for? And they didn't quite know what to say. Jesus didn't ask them any more questions. Jesus didn't give them any more information.

He just said, come and see. He knew what they were looking for all along. Someone to follow, and a place to be.

A new place, new life, a new creation. And Mary Magdalene this morning in another garden, what are you looking for? Jesus asks, and she doesn't know quite what she's looking for either until she hears her name and her eyes are open. Someone to follow, and a place to be.

A new place, new life, a new creation. And so here we all are, gathered on another Sunday, gathered on a beautiful spring morning, surrounded by all this natural beauty of early spring in the Deep South. It feels a bit as if we are also in a garden, doesn't it? And so as you sit here in this place amidst all this beauty, do you hear the voice of Jesus calling? Do you hear Jesus saying to you, what are you looking for? Good question, isn't it? Good question.

In fact, in some ways there's no more important question in the whole world. What are you looking for? As we think about it, let's go back to our story for a moment. When Mary recognizes Jesus, evidently her first reaction is to reach out for him.

We guess this because Jesus says, do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to my Father. There's a beautiful fresco by Fra Angelico, maybe you've seen it. Mary is reaching out to Jesus, and Jesus is at a distance.

The Latin name for that fresco is *Noli me tangere*. It's translated from Latin, do not cling to me. Isn't it interesting that Jesus does not say, right Mary, here I am back again.

Let's get out of here and go find the other so we can all go back home. I mean, I guess that's the way I'd write the story. No, he doesn't say that at all.

Instead, he says, do not cling to me. Do not hang on to me. Don't hang on to the past.

The past is over. Something new is being born. You know, I think we so often yearn for something in an idealized past, and we imagine if only we could get back to that idealized past and everything would be just fine.

You know, back to 2019 before COVID. Back to 2010 before social media was such a cancer on everyone's lives. Back to, I don't know, 1956.

What's your idealized version of the past? Back to whenever we imagine that things were better than they are now. But you know what, my dear friends, the resurrection is just the opposite. After the resurrection, things will never be the same.

Things certainly weren't the same for Mary or for the other disciples. Once Mary really experienced the resurrection, once she really experienced the power and the presence of a risen Lord, things would never be the same. Something new was being born.

What the risen Jesus was telling Mary is, you don't need to hold on to me because I got a hold of you. Isn't that what we're really here today looking for? If we really

allow the risen Lord to get a hold of us, things won't ever be normal, whatever that means anymore. Things will be different, that's for sure.

And maybe, you know, maybe we just can't quite see the future because, you know what, the future hasn't happened yet. But if the risen Lord has a hold of us, we can face that unknown future with hope and with confidence. And that, I think, is really what we're all looking for.

Not to control the future. I mean, Adam and Eve shows us that that's a fool's game. What we're really looking for is confidence and hope as we step out into that unknown future.

The confidence and hope we get when we hear the risen Christ call each one of us by name. So this morning, as you leave this garden, know that you are in the midst of the experience of resurrection. You didn't really come here today looking for information.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, you came here today looking for transformation. And that's exactly what gives us hope and confidence as we step off into the unknown future. The risen Lord is right here and already out there, and he knows each one of our names.

Amen.