

## ***Raised with Him***

Meditation on John 20: 1-18

April 1, 2018

Easter Sunday

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

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**20** *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

<sup>11</sup> *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am*

*ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

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The first time I met Fred Rogers, I was a little kid. I saw him on his Public Television Show, *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*. I liked his puppets and the toy trolley that introduced the land of Make-Believe. I wasn't sure why he was always putting on a sweater and sneakers in the house. I always took off my sweater or jacket when I came home. I never wore shoes in the house. And his urban neighborhood was very different from my country dwelling. For one thing, we didn't have people from the community ringing the doorbell all the time, bringing packages and stopping by to say hello.

But it was always a beautiful day in his neighborhood. And he looked right at me and called me his friend. The youngest of 3, with 2 working parents, I was a latchkey kid and lonely sometimes.

The second time I met Fred Rogers, I lived in another town and had 3 young children of my own. My life was chaotic and exhausting. But I always looked forward to lunch with Mr. Rogers and my kids at the middle of the day. That was one of the few times my oldest would sit on my lap, quietly transfixed on Trolley, and the world of Make Believe, puppets, musical guests and factory tours. I will never forget his excitement seeing how crayons were made. Rogers reminded me that it **was** a beautiful day in the neighborhood--and how blessed I was. I appreciated that he talked with my

children about expressing their feelings in positive ways, being kind and to never be afraid to learn new things and ask questions. I liked that he sang all the time, even though he didn't have an amazing voice. I didn't know that he wrote all the songs he sang. One of my favorites is, "It's You I Like."

"It's you I like,  
It's not the things you wear,  
It's not the way you do your hair  
But it's you I like  
The way you are right now,  
The way down deep inside you  
Not the things that hide you...

It's you I like."

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We can only imagine the sorrow and terror the first disciples felt on the morning after the Sabbath that followed Christ's death. Were all their hopes and dreams of the Kingdom Christ proclaimed destroyed at the cross?

In John, Mary--and not any of the original 12 male disciples--is the first to arrive at the tomb, coming while it is still dark-- probably between 3 and 6 a.m. It would be unusual and dangerous for a woman to come alone to a tomb, when grave robbing is common. But perhaps the grief is so great, she isn't thinking clearly. All she can think about is Jesus' body is gone! She doesn't even react to seeing the angels in his tomb. It's as if she cannot take it all in, nearly running into Jesus when she turns to leave--then mistaking him for a gardener.

The repetition of, "Woman, why are you weeping" always touches

my heart, revealing that Christ and the angels care about Mary's grief, though his death and resurrection are part of a much larger plan for the world. Mary has been a faithful follower since Jesus cast 7 demons out of her. Because she is named more than a dozen times in the gospels, you might argue that she plays a more important role than most of the male disciples. Of course, Jesus knows she is looking for him when he asks, kindly and gently, "Whom are you looking for?" I can almost see a twinkle in his eye. Can't you?

She doesn't recognize Jesus until he calls her by name. This makes me think of Isaiah 43:1, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

Jesus sends Mary off to be his messenger, telling the men at home, probably still sleeping, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

She tells them that and more.

She says, "I have seen the Lord!"

It won't be until much later-- after more appearances of the Risen Christ and the coming of the Spirit--that the disciples come to understand what has happened and begin to think of what it all means.

On Easter, we celebrate our risen Lord and that *we will be raised to new life with Him*, a life of kindness and service that begins, with the Spirit's help, in this world.

<sup>4</sup>For Christ's love compels us," Paul says in 2 Cor. 5, "because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who

died for them and was raised again ....<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

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The third time I met Mr. Rogers was just a few years ago, and everything became clear. He wasn't just a TV personality, and his show, which celebrated 50 years in February, was no ordinary children's program. He was a Presbyterian pastor, with a master's from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a bachelor's in music composition from Rollins College. Everything he was doing was a calling and a ministry, ordained by our denomination.

Without mentioning God, Jesus or Scripture, he revealed the Kingdom of God for children and families through his **beautiful**, loving neighborhood. His question, “Won't you be my neighbor?” is an echo of the Good Samaritan parable, when a lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” The neighborhood and Fred Roger's gentle, joyful manner with children and adults were an invitation to embrace the love of God *for all human beings*, and to love, as He loves, even those who are different from us.

Mr. Rogers had the courage to address topics other children's programs would not dare talk about, such as divorce, death, and racism. In 1968, his was the first children's show to feature an African American as a regular member of the cast. Francois Clemmons, a classically trained tenor whom Rogers met in church, was persuaded to play a police officer named Officer

Clemmons.

Clemmons recalls that in 1969, when some white people in Pittsburgh didn't want African Americans swimming in public pools, the show featured Rogers, pants' legs rolled up, resting his feet in a plastic baby pool on a hot day. He invited Officer Clemmons to come, sit down, roll up his pants' legs, and rest his feet in the water with him. The camera closed in on the two brown feet next to the two white feet as they talked and sang about friendship. Near the end of the scene, Fred helped dry Officer Clemmons' feet with a towel. They revisited this scene in their last episode together in 1993.

Mr. Rogers never wanted the children to know he was sick--and frighten them. He died of cancer in 2003, just a few months after he stopped working. He had won 4 Emmy awards, a Peabody and a Presidential Medal of Freedom, among other honors, including having one of his iconic sweaters on display at the Smithsonian. But an acceptance speech for a 1997 Lifetime Achievement Award at the Daytime Emmys revealed his gratitude and humility, and took the audience by surprise.

Fred said, "All of us have special ones who have loved us into being. Would you just take, along with me, ten seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are. Ten seconds of silence."

And then he lifted his wrist, looked at the audience, looked at his watch, and said, "I'll watch the time." There was stunned silence as people slowly realized that he wasn't kidding. Then the seconds passed, and the tears started to flow as people did as he asked.

My friends, on this joyous Easter Sunday, in this beautiful church, when we are reminded of Christ's resurrection and our promise of being raised with him, will you take a moment and consider who loved you into being-- who helped you become who you are, encouraged you in your walk of faith. And told you what a special person you are. Because you are.

After 10 seconds, Mr. Rogers looked up from his watch and said softly, "May God be with you all."

Let us pray.

Holy One, we thank you for the blessings of this day--of time with loved ones and remembering loved ones and beautiful Easters past. Thank you for all the saints who showed the way to follow Christ, saints such as Mary Magdalene, who isn't even called a disciple, though we know she was. Thank you for their persistence and obedience to your Son's command to share the Good News. Christ is risen from the dead! Thank you for sending your Son to be the sacrifice for our sins--for making a way when there was no way for us to be reconciled with you and one another. Help us to reveal through our kindness and service, using all the gifts and resources you have given us, to our hope in Christ and the promise of being raised with Him to new life. In His name we pray. Amen.