

# Lingering on Easter

[John 20:1-20](#)

INTRO:

Some people move through Easter too fast and totally miss it's meaning. Some linger on Easter and their lives are changed forever. We will think about this today on Easter Sunday. We will see that Mary Magdalene lingered on Easter morning, unlike the other disciples. And she got to see Jesus. She got to speak directly to the risen Christ. Sometimes we, like Mary, need to just stay, to linger close to Jesus, until we come to believe in Jesus. Until we are given the full Easter faith we want. We do well to stay close to Jesus so that the risen Christ may come close to us.

ME:

It is so easy for me as a pastor to get so caught up in the machinery of the Easter season that I miss Jesus all together. **But not this year, not this Easter!**

YOU:

**How about you?** It is possible to get so caught up in the Easter Bunny that we might forget the **need** or the **benefit** of lingering on Easter.

Let's pray for God to open our hearts the way he opened that tomb to rise from the dead...

GOD:

*John 20:1 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. 2 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." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes. 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 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. 13 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." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 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.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17 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.’ ” 18 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.***

WE:

A group of disciples went to the tomb on Easter morning. I am sure they were very sad as they went out to pay their respects to the body of their dead teacher. Mary Magdalene was one of the women who was in this group going out to the cemetery to mourn. Her friend, teacher and Lord, Jesus had died. The one who had **reached** out to her and **loved** her had died. Imagine how adrift she must have felt in her grief of having lost her anchor. Perhaps she just wanted to be close to Jesus to feel some connection to him. As though he could sense her presence and even hear her sobbing grief. She wasn't ready to let him go yet.

When people grieve, it is a wonderful thing when they can just put one foot in front of another. To just keep on going is a great achievement. That may be just why Mary went out to the tomb on Easter morning.

Mary was a true disciple. She didn't leave like the others did. And she is the one who helped them begin to turn from **fear** to **faith** because she did what Jesus told her to do. She gets so little credit for what followed for the Christian faith, but without her it would not be. At least it would be very different.

Scripture offers very little commentary on the nature of resurrection, whether of Jesus or of Christians. It does suggest both a **sameness** and a **discontinuity** between the **mortal** body and the **glorified** body. On one hand, continuity is seen when we learn that the resurrected person is "**the same individual**" and "**the same character**" as the one who died. Only some sort of physical sameness can explain the fact that the resurrection of Jesus produced an empty tomb.

So, resurrection somehow involves a **transformation** of the mortal body. But Paul's defense of resurrection in his letter to the Corinthians reveals a real **discontinuity** as well:

***"When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body" (1 Cor. 15:37–38).***

This plant is seen not only as some extension of the seed, but as a new reality with "**its own body.**" So their slowness in recognizing Jesus may

show not only the limited ability of grief-stricken disciples to grasp a new truth, but also the mysterious nature of resurrection.

When Mary heard her own name on the lips of Jesus, she blurted out her familiar name for Jesus — **Rabboni**. **Did this return to the familiar reflect her failure to understand the radically reality of resurrection?** In time she would learn that Jesus had not been only **restored** to her, but **glorified** in the highest way possible. Immersed in joy, Mary began to grasp Jesus in adoration and worship. *She would NOT lose him again!* But this was probably motivated in part by her misunderstanding. Jesus told her not to hold on to him, for he had not yet returned to the Father. She should go instead to the disciples and share this message for Jesus, **“I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”**

Mary lingered on Easter. She had faith, even though life gave her every reason to abandon faith and move on with life. **Have you ever felt like that about your own faith?** Perhaps there was just too much distracting you in life. Too many reasons to leave it all behind and see what the **“real”** world can do to fill the God-shaped hole in our hearts. That will never satisfy us. That will never do it for you. Only the emptiness of the tomb will do it. *Only the abundant life in Christ will satisfy you and me and you!*

**“But Chris,”** you may be saying to yourself, **“my faith is too small to go against life!”** Well, every now and then, I say something pretty smart that

surprises me and everyone else! During one of the later sessions of the Bible in 90 days study, we were talking about mustard seed faith and what that really means. And I said something everyone really liked and I even said that maybe I should write it down. I did not write it down, but it was a pretty simple idea. Simple can be **smart** and **profound**, though. It was along the lines of our using the faith we have to do what we can do at the time, and watching how our faith will grow because we are using it. Before I get too proud of my being a “**random genius**” this is kind of like something that was said to John Wesley. The founder of the Methodist movement, used to advise his traveling preachers (who sometimes confessed to a certain weakness of faith), “**Preach faith until you have it.**” By that Wesley meant that it is important to keep **repeating** and **rehearsing** the faith that we **have** until it becomes the faith we **want**. Really, we don’t “**have**” this faith. It’s better to say that this faith “**has us.**” But sometimes, when it comes to believing in Jesus, the first thing is just to believe that Christ desires our faith. That he will come to us and give us the faith we need, if we just linger and stay.

John Wesley had a real struggle finding assurance of his salvation. He spoke about it to Peter Bohler. Wesley had decided to quit preaching. But Bohler said to him, “**Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.**” This is a kind of precursor to our modern saying, “**fake it until you make it.**”

Use the faith you have to do what you can to serve God and neighbor now and watch it grow now. Watch it become more real now.

It is important to keep **repeating** and **rehearsing** the faith that we **have** until it becomes the faith we **want**. We don't "**have**" this faith . . . this faith "**has us**." But sometimes, when it comes to believing in Jesus, the first thing is just to believe that Christ desires our faith. That he will come to us and give us the faith we need, if we just linger and stay.

An Orthodox priest lectured on the creeds of the church and their development. At the end of his lecture a student rose and asked, "**But what do you do when you have trouble believing some part of the creed? What can you do when you, in integrity, cannot affirm the whole creed?**" The priest replied simply, "**You can keep saying it until you believe it. Give yourself some time; it will eventually come to you.**" What a **wonderful Wesleyan way** of belief.

*Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.*

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

***Stay close to Jesus so that the risen Christ may come close to us.***

YOU:

**Will you linger on Easter this time? How will you do it? How will you allow the risen Christ to live through you?**

CLOSE:

If we linger on Easter our lives will be changed forever, because of the Easter effect.

In a Wall Street Journal article, George Weigel gives a combination history lesson and apologetic for the Resurrection:

There is no accounting for the rise of Christianity without weighing the revolutionary effect on those nobodies of what they called “the Resurrection.” They encountered one whom they embraced as the Risen Lord, whom they first knew as the itinerant Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, and who died an agonizing and shameful death on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem.

As N.T. Wright ... makes clear, that first generation answered the question of why they were Christians with a straightforward answer: because Jesus was raised from the dead .... As they worked that out, their thinking about a lot of things changed profoundly.

The article mentions some of the positive secular outcomes brought to the ancient world through Christianity:

A new dignity given to woman in contrast to the classical culture.

A self-denying healthcare provided to plague sufferers.

A focus on family health and growth.

A remarkable change in worship from the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday

A willingness to embrace death as martyrs—because they knew that death did not have the final word in the human story.

Living as if they knew the outcome of history itself.

Weigel suggests that it's only through, what he calls **the Easter Effect**, that these changes make sense. The social changes that followed Good Friday occur only if they actually believed in the resurrection of Jesus.

*Jesus is alive!* He lives in you and me and through you and me. The Easter effect continues in the world through us as we linger on Easter and use the faith we have to do what we can. And watch it grow! It may not even be discernible to the eye but it will leave a mark of grace on those around you.

*Let's pray to Jesus now...*