

Easter - Christ is Risen, No Foolin'!
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Epistle: I Corinthians 1:18, 21-25,30-31LB
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Gospel: John 20:1-18 NIV

¹⁸I know very well how foolish it sounds to those who are lost,^[b] when they hear that Jesus died to save them. But we who are saved recognize this message as the very power of God....

²¹For God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find God through human brilliance, and then he stepped in and saved all those who believed his message, which the world calls foolish and silly. ²²It seems foolish to the Jews because they want a sign from heaven as proof that what is preached is true; and it is foolish to the Gentiles because they believe only what agrees with their philosophy and seems wise to them. ²³So when we preach about Christ dying to save them, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. ²⁴But God has opened the eyes of those called to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, to see that Christ is the mighty power of God to save them; Christ himself is the center of God's wise plan for their salvation. ²⁵This so-called "foolish" plan of God is far wiser than the wisest plan of the wisest human, and God in his weakness—Christ dying on the cross—is far stronger than any human.

³⁰For it is from God alone that you have your life through Christ Jesus. Christ showed us God's plan of salvation; he was the one who made us acceptable to God; he made us pure and holy^[c] and gave himself to purchase our salvation. ³¹As it says in the Scriptures, "If anyone is going to boast, let him boast only of what the Lord has done."

John 20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,⁷as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Today is April Fool's day! Oh, I mean it's Easter—Christ is Risen!!

You know, truth is stranger than fiction. No foolin'! It was reported in the New York Daily News (6-28-17) that a when a driver in Minnesota was pulled over for driving without a seatbelt, it turned out that the driver was wanted on a warrant. So the driver produced a "GET OUT OF JAIL FREE" card from

a Monopoly game, in hopes that the police would let him off with a warning. No such luck! He landed in jail, but local law enforcement posted on their social media page that they appreciated his attempt at humor and gave him an "A" for effort! No foolin' I'm not making this up! *(source: Brian Lisi, "Minnesota Man Tried Handing Deputy Monopoly 'Get Out Of Jail Free' Card, Did Not Get To Pass Go," New York Daily News (6-28-17)*

Some might say, Easter is only for fools. It is not normal for the dead to come back to life. It just doesn't happen. Not after being dead and buried for three days, anyway!

Some years ago Rob and I shared our home with a family of four, Brent and Carol and their two children. At the time, their daughter Lindsay was 4 years old. We overheard her explaining Easter to her 2 and ½ year old brother Blake:

"Jesus was killed by some bad people. They put him in a cave and put a big rock in front of it. Three days later, God said: 'Bippetty bobbetty boo!' And Jesus came alive again!!"

Who—only a fool, perhaps--could possibly believe that Christ is alive? He was flogged--that alone was meant to kill a person. Then he spent approximately 6 hours on the cross. No one ever survived a crucifixion. He is buried in a tomb, sealed with a huge stone.

No possible way could Christ survive all of that. No way.

I agree! Christ did not survive. Christ did not somehow "re-vive" in the cool of the tomb. No.

Our confessions, such as the Apostles' Creed agrees with the scriptures:

Jesus...
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried,
He descended into hell;
The third day he rose again from the dead...

All four gospels record the events of the first Easter—they are in agreement as to the essential facts. Each one records some slightly different details. Why is this?

Suppose we divide into four groups and place ourselves on one of each of the four corners at the intersection of Porter and Griffin. Suppose that as we stand there and watch, a collision occurs in the middle of the intersection.

All of us observe the exact same event, however when the police show up and interview us as eye witnesses, our accounts will differ slightly. Why? Because we each saw the event from a different perspective or vantage point.

Also, depending on the person we might be reporting to, or our relationship to the persons involved in the collision, we might emphasize different aspects. Given her background in nursing, Pastor Cindy might focus on anyone with injuries and alert the paramedics to what she observed. However, a person with knowledge of auto mechanics might focus on the failure of the vehicles to stop, and the possible causes of that, and so on.

All four Gospel writers agree about the following:

1—No description is given of the act of Resurrection. It remains a mystery!

2—The Risen Christ appears only to believers, his followers.

3—The Risen Christ appears both to individuals, as well as to large groups.

4—The Risen Christ is received hesitantly, at first.

5—No mere report was accepted. (In other words, people wanted corroboration—visual confirmation--to the verbal accounts of witnesses. Some, like Thomas, wanted not only to see Jesus but to touch him.)

6—The outcome of encounters with the Risen Christ, issued in a conviction of the presence of the Living Lord with the disciples, that resulted in changed lives and a changed world! (Brooke Foss Westcott, annotated by LMC, referenced by F.D. Bruner, p. 1138, [John](#))

The gospels also agree that:

The tomb is visited by women, and in the predawn darkness. They encounter an empty tomb, and an angel or two. Mary Magdalene is named in all four of the Gospels, and she figures prominently in John's account, which is our focus this morning.

And so it is that John describes Mary arriving at the tomb while it is still dark. She observes the stone, now removed from the entrance, and notes the tomb is empty.) This is alarming, so she runs (sense of urgency), to tell r Peter and John. Mary believes the tomb is empty because the lifeless body of Christ has been removed.

Then a foot race ensues between Peter and John. They arrive to also find the tomb accessible, but no corpse; only the graveclothes remain. Looking in cautiously, then they enter. No lifeless body, only strips of linen and the piece that had covered Jesus' head, folded separately, remaining. John tells us that "he saw and believed". Foolish or faithful? Which is he?

In this account Peter is uncharacteristically silent. Perhaps both are still grieving, overwhelmed. Then, without explanation, the two male disciples return home. This adds to the mystery, the suspense. There is more to this story...

Mary Magdalene remains. Mary was one of the very few followers who remained with Jesus at the foot of the cross, until he breathed his last. Mary is the first at the tomb early on Sunday morning, and even now, after the departure of Peter and John, she remains. In life and in death, Mary desires only one thing: to be close to her Lord.

Mary weeps, deep in grief. On glancing once again into the tomb, she observes two angels who ask her sympathetically: "Why are you crying?"

She expresses for a second time, her belief that Jesus' body has been removed, and her desire to know where it is. **Then—in the literal and figurative turning point in the story—Mary turns and faces the Risen Christ, though he is unrecognizable in that moment.** She believes him to be the gardener, someone who might assist in her search for the body.

Before she turns, Mary is in deep despair in the face of unconquerable death.

After she turns, Mary's spirit soars with exultation.

In that moment—when Jesus calls her by name, "Mary"—she recognizes him as her Teacher, her Lord, her Savior!

This encounter strikes me as so intimate...so personal...so unique to the two persons involved. **To know and to call someone by name is a powerful and meaningful interaction.** When I was in college, I'd been dating a classmate for several months. At the time I was student teaching during the day and taking coursework at night. Classes ended at 10 p.m. and it was a significant distance between my classroom and where my car was parked. I figured he was pretty serious about this relationship because he would often meet me after class and escort me to my car. One evening as we were parting, he gave me a rather passionate kiss, and then said: "*I love you, Laverne!*" Oops! NOT a good time to call someone by the *wrong* name!!

(Maybe I'm the fool—I've been married to him for almost 40+ years now!)

Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and "calls them by name, and his sheep "know his voice" (John 10:3-4)

Not until Jesus speaks her name does Mary know him. She recognizes the voice that called her to wholeness when she was healed, the voice that welcomed her into a circle of friendship, this voice that took her seriously and conveyed value and worth to women, who were in that ancient culture, considered property. Mary recognized this voice as that of her Teacher, her Lord, her Savior!

During seasons when troops from Joint Base Lewis-McCord were being deployed in overseas combat, their return was a big deal—not only because they had been gone for months at a time, but also because they had served in harm's way and survived. Local news crews often recorded the family reunions. The soldiers search the crowd, looking for the familiar faces of family. Then the flicker of recognition, and without fail, the natural reaction was always a warm, tearful embrace! Often one in which both parties are reluctant to let go!

This is exactly how Mary greets the Risen Lord—a warm, tearful embrace.

The force of the word in Greek is actually "*Please do not keep holding on to me*". It is a present tense imperative, *meaning to cease doing something one is presently doing*. Jesus is not an untouchable ghost; he is a real, affectionate human being with a physical body. *Jesus permits Mary to embrace him, but as in the reunion of military families, she was reluctant to let go! (Jesus' resurrection body was different, but it bore the signs of crucifixion, it was huggable, and later with the disciples on the beach, Jesus ate with them.)*

Jesus is urging her to release him, because the Risen Lord has more to do, and he has a mission for Mary to undertake as well. As much as Mary might desire to cling to Christ, it is more urgent that she share this experience! Jesus tells her he must ascend to the Father, while he instructs her to "Go and tell!"

"Go tell my **brothers...**" In spite of betrayals, denials, and desertions by the disciples during the previous week, Jesus calls them "brothers"! In this

very expression, Jesus conveys both *the fact that they are forgiven, and they are family...“My brothers”*. *This is an extravagant expression of grace* Mary does as she is told, and announces to the disciples, **“I have seen the Lord!”** and she conveys Jesus’ message to them. **Mary is the first to encounter the Risen Lord, and the first witness of the Resurrected Christ!**

What are we to make of this?

The dead do not live, speak, or hug, for that matter—that is foolishness!

Go and tell? A fool’s errand.

The cross? How offensive to think that a crucifixion could have any meaning beyond what it represented: the death penalty.

Nonsense! Foolishness! But the Apostle Paul “nails it” when he wrote:

²⁴But God has opened the eyes of those called to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, to see that Christ is the mighty power of God to save them; Christ himself is the center of God’s wise plan for their salvation. ²⁵This so-called “foolish” plan of God is far wiser than the wisest plan of the wisest human, and God in his weakness—Christ dying on the cross—is far stronger than any human. (I Corinthians 1:24-25)

Honestly, I’d rather be a fool for Christ than not, because...self-sacrificing love is stronger than death. This is the message of Easter!

You and I are personally known and loved by God, who foolishly sent his one and only Son to die and rise again so that you and I can experience abundant life, today and forever.

The Risen Christ is calling you by name this morning...how will you respond?

Let us pray...

Risen One:

Open our eyes Lord, to see you and ourselves in new ways...

Open our ears Lord, to hear your voice, when you call our names...

Open our hearts Lord, to embrace and be embraced by your grace-full love.

With immense gratitude we pray...Amen.