



St. Luke's East Hampton

Easter Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

April 5, 2026; Easter A: [Acts 10:34-43](#); [1 Corinthians 15:19-26](#); [John 20:1-18](#)

It looked like the Roman authorities had won. On the eve of one of Judaism's most holy of days, they had tried and convicted Jesus, forced him to march through the streets, then hung him up on a cross and left him to die outside the city walls. When it was over, his body had been thrown in someone else's tomb. Three days later, the Romans seem to have added insult to injury by taking away the body before it could be properly cleaned and the embalming process could be completed. Seeing the empty tomb and afraid that the Romans would go after them next, Peter and the other disciple ran away to their homes, where, the scriptures tell us, they stayed hiding behind locked doors for more than a week.

Exhausted and overwhelmed, Mary Magdalene stayed in the garden by the tomb, where she stood there and cried. Someone who looked like a landscape worker came to her and asked, "Why are you weeping?" Put yourself in that scene. Can you hear her words? Can you see the pain and grief pouring out of her heart? She looked at him and said, "Why am I weeping? "Didn't you hear the shouts of the crowds? Haven't people told you about the trial before Pilate, the denial of Peter, or the betrayal of Judas?" Why am I weeping? Don't you know what's going on in the world around us right now? Do you not get that person who we thought would fix everything was taken away right when we needed him the most? Why am I weeping? Do you not understand that I just lost my best friend, my soul mate, the man I loved more than anyone else, the one person who understood me, who listened to my fears, got my jokes, knew all my faults and still loved me just for being me?" Now her grief is tinged with a bit of anger. "The question shouldn't be why I am weeping. The question should be, why aren't you!"

Imagine the silence after she gets it all out, after she lays all her feelings, frustrations and fears at Jesus' feet. Now imagine Jesus looking at her, saying her name. At that moment, she recognized him and everything that had been weighing her down was

suddenly, completely, taken away. Did you notice that when Mary responded she called Jesus “Rabbouni” instead of “Rabbi?” “Rabbi” means “teacher.” “Rabbouni” means “my teacher.” The use of “Rabbouni” hints at the intimacy and love that Jesus and Mary shared. When Jesus said her name, she recognized him, knew he was there, and knew everything would be OK. When Jesus said her name, Mary realized not just that he was alive, but that she could live again as well.

Tradition says that Mary Magdalene had what you might call an interesting past. Take this with a grain of salt. Scholars suggest that some of the legends about Mary Magdalene were created by a male hierarchy in the church that was so uncomfortable with her taking such a prominent role that they even suppressed a gospel written in her name. We don't actually know that much about her. The reality is that like all of us she probably had things she regretted, things she had done and left undone. She had her baggage. She had struggled with her demons. None of this came up in her conversation with Jesus because Jesus had been taken care of all of that a long time ago. Mary didn't need to be forgiven or told she was accepted or loved because she had been forgiven and accepted and loved the first time she and Jesus met. The same, by the way, is true for you. The song, “He's making a list and checking it twice, going to find out whose naughty and nice,” isn't talking about Jesus... and isn't talking about Easter. The idea of someone needing to die in order to appease an angry god might have made sense in the ancient world but it doesn't make sense in our modern one and it's not what we are celebrating today. Jesus didn't come to Mary Magdalene with judgment. Jesus came to Mary Magdalene with compassion and love. Today Jesus is coming to you in the same way. Like Mary Magdalene, you have already been forgiven. It doesn't matter what you have done or what other people say about you. Like Mary Magdalene, you are loved. Like Mary Magdalene, you can move away from the tomb. Like Mary Magdalene, Easter is here so you can live again.

Last week I said that Jesus didn't die for our sins but because of them. Jesus died because he turned over the tables in the temple and in people's lives. Jesus died because he lived in a way and proclaimed a kingdom that threatened the greatest empire the world had ever seen. Jesus died because he dared to love and put that love first of all. Jesus died because humanity was separated from God and disconnected from the source of life, of love, and energy in the universe itself. Jesus was raised to put those connections back in

place. Jesus' death and resurrection are a bridge over the gap between the way things are and the way God created them to be. Jesus' death and resurrection are a way to get us back in relationship with God and one another. Jesus died to take the power away from death. Jesus died to turn it all around. When it comes to Easter, reconciliation and resurrection are one and the same. In almost every language except English, the name of Easter is a derivation of the Latin word *Pascha*. *Pascha* means "Passover." Easter is the Christian Passover: the passing over from death to life for Jesus... and for us.

Mary Magdalene's first impulse was to give Jesus a hug. He told her not to hold on to him yet, but to simply hold on, because his work wasn't over. To wrap it all up, he needed to ascend to God. The resurrection would be complete when he took on his role as the Lord of the Universe itself. Easter, in other words, is bigger than we think. Easter is bigger than ourselves, our community, our church and our world itself. Easter is here to put the cosmos itself back in sync. Easter is here to get the music of the spheres back in tune. This is great stuff. The problem with Jesus' ascension to heaven, however, is that the responsibility for being Jesus on earth is left to his body, his people – like you and me. After the resurrection, the Bible has a vocabulary change. After the resurrection, Jesus' followers are no longer called disciples. After the resurrection, they are called "apostles." Disciples are those who follow, those who learn. Apostles are those who are sent. On the first Easter morning Mary Magdalene became what has been called the "*apostula apostolorum*," the apostle who brought good news to the apostles and to the world itself. On this Easter Day, we are given the role of being *apostula apostolorum* ourselves.

In the garden outside the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene learned that Jesus had been with her all along – even when she thought he was gone. It all became clear when Jesus called her name. Jesus is calling your name right now. On that first Easter morning, it looked like the Roman authorities had won. With everything going on in our world, it can feel the same way today. Easter tells us a different story. Easter proclaims that God has raised Jesus from the dead and that because he lives, we too can live. Easter tells us that new life is possible and can begin today. As apostles to the apostles, our task is to give others this message and show them it is true.