**Gospel**: John 20:1-18

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. 2So 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.” 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and 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. 13They 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.” 14When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus 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.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers [and sisters] and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Message**: No Surprise

John tells this part of the story beautifully. He brilliantly develops all the events with elements that go into a good story. It’s a love story; it’s mystery. There has been great loss in the aftermath of a horrific tragedy. What happened is not revealed in this particular scene, but we know. We were there—not the ones who scattered. We stayed to the end watching as those who did not know returned to their houses, grief-stricken. It will be a sleepless night.

In predawn hours, one woman comes to the tomb in an attempt to come to grips with what has happened—when what has happened makes no sense. There is surprise, shock actually, to her already fragile composure, when she arrives at the tomb, a place of permanence and finality, just to be in the last place where she had seen him, the One who had given her new life and hope. Now, she is trying to contemplate a future without him. Upon her arrival, just when she thinks nothing could be worse, it’s worse. The stone has been moved; the tomb is empty. How can people be so cruel, so hateful to want to cause pain upon pain by desecrating the corpse, stealing it, hiding it.

The story continues: unexpected events can cause uncharacteristic behavior. She runs back to the house—not a proper activity for a woman in that culture—to tell the followers of this further humiliation. Two of the guys have a comedic foot race to the tomb to affirm her discovery that leads to more confusion mixed with belief (believe what?) and wonder. The linens are there, casually tossed aside. The aroma of aloe and spice lingers; just the body is gone. They are unable, at the moment, to grasp the significance of the empty tomb. They leave scratching their heads, and she is again alone.

There is a brief moment of calm before the appearance of the supernatural, two figures robed in white are seated where the body had been laid. “Why are you crying?” Excitement is building. It always does when the supernatural are involved. She is so distraught, it doesn’t register with her who/what these beings are. All that occupies her entire being is he is gone. Have you ever been so grieved that even angels can’t console you or bring you back to “reason”? Heartsick, she turns and sees “the gardener?” This is where the story gets really good. **We** know what’s going to happen. Anticipation! We’re just waiting for the her to catch up for that climactic moment of recognition when He says her name.

Now pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place. Words he had said about an inconceivable occurrence begin to resonate. T*he Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.* She is claimed by the full truth of the resurrection. The empty tomb, the casually discarded burial cloths are the concrete reality of the resurrection. The Power that brought her to the moment of recognition, is not of this world or human origin. It is this Divine Power that brings all peoples and all nations to the moment of recognition. Christ is risen. Christ is alive.

The best part of this story is that it happened. How do **we** know? First, she returned to her friends and **told** what **she** had seen and what he had said to her. “I have seen the Lord.” Isn’t that a nice story? But, the story doesn’t end here. There is an epilogue.

Later, the Lord appeared to the others also. How many had gathered in that upper room? Several dozen men and women: his mother and close companions. He told her and he told others, “Go, and tell what you have seen and what you have heard.” That’s how **we** know. People who were **there** told the story. It’s such a great story that people tell it again and again. It is a Divine mystery of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell; Jesus, who came from heaven and lived among us humans. He taught what God is like: he taught from personal experience. He taught how God wants humans to live with each other. He taught how God loves and how we are to love. He healed our illnesses and afflictions, he fed thousands, released captives and brought good news to the oppressed. He challenged the unfair treatment of the authorities on the poor and outcasts. He was innocent of any crime, yet he suffered, died on a cross, and on the third day **God** raised him from the dead. He took on all the sins of this world so we can be forgiven. He appeared physically to his closest companions. He ascended to heaven, and people saw this. He is in perfect union with God and the Holy Spirit, three in one. He is with us always.

In the story, the beloved disciple sees the empty tomb and believes, but he did not completely understand the full implication of the resurrection. Does any mortal? What we are commanded to do is tell the story, our story, that Jesus is not a “general idea’ or a ghostly presence. We witness to the Presence of Jesus in the depth of our being that is beyond our conscious or unconscious mind. We tell how the Easter gospel touches **our** life in ways we cannot see, until in retrospect, **we** turn and see Jesus at work in the power of the resurrection, the Power that brings new life out of tragedy and despair. We tell the story to all who join us weekly, or for those who take our parking space and sit in our pew on Christmas and Easter. We may not tell the story with the skill of John. We tell the beautiful story of the good news of salvation to anyone who will listen and to those who don’t want to hear it. God will fashion it whatever way God wants it to be, in order to build his Church. For us the Easter Gospel may be an all-too familiar story, but each time we read it, each time we tell it, we get excited waiting for Mary to recognize Jesus. We tell the story trying to prove nothing. We tell the Easter gospel, and then we wait excitedly, as we did in the garden, for them to recognize Jesus. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**: **God of grace, be with us**."

In this time of confusion, grief, vulnerability and loss, Let us pray, **God of grace, be with us.** That those who serve you in all countries and all traditions may remember your love, embrace your forgiveness, and hold fast to your hope. Let us pray to God, **God of grace, be with us.** That the leaders of this nation, and all others in authority, may they be guided by your Wisdom, and find strength and courage to know and accomplish your purposes in the midst of the evil of these days. Let us pray to God, **God of grace, be with us**. That all peoples of the earth, especially those who suffer loss may have the hope of healing. Let us pray to God, **God of grace, be with us**. That we in this community who have lost loved ones, may be embraced with your love and healing grace. Let us pray to God, **God of grace, be with us**. God whose vision spans all the ages of the earth, help us to see beyond this moment and to embrace the wider perspective of your whole creation. Deliver us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge, and lead us into a way of love and justice that makes room for all peoples. Let us pray to God, **God of grace, be with us**. Amen.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: God of all mercies and compassion, Whose mercy cannot be measured and Whose love for mankind is without limit: As unprofitable servants, we bow down in reverence and awe before Your gracious majesty, and we humbly offer our thanks and gratitude for all the benefits You have poured out upon us our nation and our Church and our person.  Continue to bless these gifts we offer this day for the benefit of those in any need through Christ our Savior. Amen

**Benediction**: This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, go in his peace to tell the story. Love and serve the Lord.

**Old Testament**: Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. 7And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. 8Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

**New Testament**: Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”