

Enjoy Easter Everyday!

A sermon on John 20:1-18

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Why today? Maybe you heard the announcement last Sunday, or I introduced the service today, and you thought, "Is this guy off his rocker? Easter in October?!?" We're weeks away from Halloween, or the better celebration, Reformation. We're getting ready for winter to start, not to be finishing up.

Why Easter today?

There's a reason. It's been said every Sunday is a little Easter. Maybe you've heard that. Isn't it the truth? After all, Easter is the reason why we worship on Sundays rather than on the Saturday Sabbath. Every Sunday is a little reminder of the Easter miracle, how Jesus rose from the dead. So, is Easter today really that surprising? I would even contend that Easter isn't just something we should celebrate every Sunday, but instead every day. Every day, we enjoy Easter because every day, Jesus' resurrection affects our lives in an incredible way! And so, yes, today we are celebrating Easter. Every day, we enjoy Easter!

Now, I can tell you, the morning of that first Easter, there wasn't a whole lot of celebrating going on. At first, there wasn't really much for Mary Magdalene to enjoy.

Jesus was dead. A man she loved so dearly. A friend who always had had the perfect words of comfort and encouragement for her. And now he was gone, his body hastily placed into a tomb because the Sabbath was quickly approaching. Ok, it was better than his dead carcass being dumped in a pile of bones and left for the crows, as I'm sure happened to the bodies of the other thieves who were crucified on Good Friday

But for this man, a great teacher, even better, the Son of God, although that was getting harder to believe, she wanted to do things right. She wanted to give Jesus the proper burial.

And so, early that Sunday morning, while most were still asleep, Mary Magdalene was on her way to the tomb with the balm and the spices so she could, in a way, say her final good-byes to the lifeless body and give him one last sendoff. It was a great time for her to reflect on the events of the past week, as the only sounds heard came from the crisp crunch of her sandals over the grass, still covered with the morning's dew.

And then everything stopped. This had to be the right tomb. She had followed those men as they had carried Jesus from Calvary's mount to this newly cut grave, never used before. She had seen Pilates soldiers, trampling their way onto the scene so they could seal the tomb with the boulder, which honestly, Mary had no idea how she would ever be able to move it...all because the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders were convinced the disciples would steal Jesus' body so they could claim he had risen. But it couldn't be right...because, what Mary saw in front of her was not a huge stone separating her from her Lord. No, that had been rolled to the side. No, the tomb was wide open, and you would have thought Mary Magdalene would have been ecstatic.

But she wasn't. She immediately thought of the worst. It was those Jews, Caiaphas, Annas, the high priest, and all their goons. As if murdering Jesus in the cruelest way imaginable wasn't enough. Now THEY had stolen his body so they could desecrate it even more.

And if it wasn't them, then it had to have been grave robbers, seeing this new tomb, thinking there must be something valuable inside of it...but when all they found was a body, maybe they thought they could get some money for it somewhere, I don't know.

I can't imagine how devastated Mary must have been. She turned and she ran. And she ran. And she ran all the way back into town, and didn't stop until she reached the place where Peter and John were staying. Breathless, she exclaimed, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

I'm not quite sure what Mary expected Peter and John to be able to do. I'm not even sure they knew what they could do. But they had to check it out for themselves. So they ran. And ran. And John, probably a little younger, a little more in shape, outran Peter and reached the tomb first, and saw what Mary saw.

Peter got there, and well, you know Peter, a little bold, definitely impulsive. He went right in...and saw something he didn't expect to see. John came in and reached the same conclusion. This wasn't the work of any grave robber.

It was as if the body had never even been there. The strips of linen were there, folded up neatly on the bed of stone. The beautiful burial cloth that had covered Jesus' head, it was there too. It was separate, but it was folded up as well. A hasty grave robber would never have taken the time to do that.

It was definitely unusual. Everything was there, but Jesus wasn't. Obviously, there wasn't anything Peter or John could do, so they headed home. Peter, I'm sure, was just as confused as he had been throughout the week. John, we're told, "saw and believed." He must have sensed what had really happened, but everything was still a little grainy. By his own admission, he believed Jesus had risen, but he still didn't quite understand how the Scriptures had called it so many times, how Jesus had told them so many times he had to rise, but it still didn't register with either of them, at least at that time.

And, so, while they left, still trying to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together, Mary Magdalene stayed back. What the other disciples were coming to understand, about Jesus being alive, Mary didn't get it.

You could tell. As soon as the Peter and John were out of eyesight and earshot, she just lost it. All the grief and pain and sadness and frustrations, she couldn't contain it any longer. Mary Magdalene broke down and just started weeping uncontrollably. Could you blame her? With that loss? Here was a woman with absolutely no hope of ever seeing her Lord again, and nothing would be able to make it better. Even the two angels, sitting inside of the tomb, you would have thought she would have recognized them as such, but her despair not only kept her from seeing. It kept her from enjoying what had just happened, from celebrating the fact that Jesus had died for her sins, and even better, had risen from the dead, just as he said along he would.

Six months away from Easter. Are you still enjoying the Easter miracle, Jesus' resurrection? Or have you found yourself being more like Mary Magdalene, maybe not with an utter hopelessness and despair, but acting as if Jesus isn't risen?

I mean, of course we know Jesus is alive. We know Jesus has risen from the dead. But too often, if I'm truly honest with myself, I think too little about it and what it means for my life and how it affects the way I live.

Where I can tell, with my demeanor some days, I'm not truly appreciative of Jesus rising to save me from my sins because I'm too busy being frustrated with God because my job is too overbearing; it isn't going the way I want it to. My relationships seem to be filled mostly with conflict, I'm too easily angered; not going the way I want it to. Life in general stinks, I'm not finding a lot of reasons to be happy and definitely not joyous. That's not enjoying the resurrection.

And the way I act, some of the words to come out of my mouth, the way I treat others with disrespect, and how my actions flow out of a heart of malice rather than a heart of love. Definitely not a good way to say "thank you" and LIVE my "thank you" to God for what he's done for me. Yeah, I would say I'm not always enjoying the resurrection, and I'm guessing you might be in the same boat.

You see, the way we often think, the way we often speak, the way we often act, we're no different than Mary Magdalene. Forgetting what Jesus has done for us, despairing in hopelessness as if he hasn't risen, it's sad how often you and I fall into that sinful trap. And it's scary, because ultimate despair, ultimate hopelessness, it doesn't line up with enjoying Easter. It lines up with those who are on the other end of the spectrum, those who are in hell.

Mary herself was on that edge. She even got the point where Jesus, her risen Savior, was standing in front of her, and she couldn't see him. But on that first Easter, it took just one word, one word to take all the gloom and doom, despair and hopelessness, away. Just one word, "Mary." Later on, when Jesus would appear to his disciples for the first time, it was just one word, "Peace."

And today, six months away from Easter, if you are suffering from that same gloom and doom, and even if you aren't, it's just one word, "Risen."

Look at the verses of this account, especially verse 9. Do you see it? There's one word here that makes all the difference in the world for you and me...HAD. "Jesus HAD to rise from the dead."

Jesus HAD to rise. You see, the fact that Jesus was standing in front of Mary Magdalene merely three days after he had died on the cross, it wasn't happenstance. It was part of the plan, God's plan of love to save us. Jesus had told his followers on numerous occasions how he "must go to Jerusalem and suffering many things...that he must be killed AND on the third day be raised to life."

Paul wrote the same thing to the Romans when he said, "He (Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins AND was raised to life for our justification." That's the simple resurrection joy God declares to us. Jesus, God's Son, lived a perfect life, gave up that perfect life so he could die for all our sins on the cross, and, best of all, he was raised back to life.

Why? To show he was done with his work of saving us and forgiving our sins. To show he had won the victory over sin, Satan, and finally, even death itself. To show he has the power to finally raise us from the dead as well!

You know that message isn't new. The good news that Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose, you hear that every week. Maybe that's why they say every Sunday is a little Easter. Every Sunday, you get to enjoy a message that never gets old: Jesus rose for you! And I would even say you don't have to wait until Sunday to enjoy that either. Every day you wake up, a saved, forgiven child of God because Jesus rose for you!

But you know what's even better? Enjoying Easter not just every day, but enjoying it for eternity.

When Mary Magdalene saw Jesus, she was so elated. She grabbed hold of him, and you know, I don't think she intended on letting go.

But she had to. Jesus had to go. He told her, "Don't hold on to me...Go...to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father...to my God.'" It was like he was telling her, "I'm back, but don't get too comfortable with me being here. I'm leaving for heaven soon."

You know, that's not bad news at all. Because Jesus being in heaven means he's preparing a place for us in heaven, where we'll celebrate his eternal victory after we, too, are resurrected.

Now, victory in this life over sin, eternal victory over death in heaven, it's all ours. How can you not enjoy that? How can you not be excited to celebrate a little Easter every Sunday, even half a year away? How can you not live every moment of your life, not despairing, but in thanks to Jesus because what he HAD to do, but also what he wanted to do to save us?

We owe our very lives to Jesus. That's what we emphasize on Easter Sunday. That's what the gospel does for us. It lifts us out of our chains and slavery and places us fully and securely into the grasp of God's salvation. Jesus has won for us life forever because of Easter, because of his resurrection.

I need to hear that every single Sunday, to sing that every single Sunday, and to believe that every single day. You do to. So, celebrate with me. Enjoy Easter today. Jesus lives! Enjoy Easter everyday! Jesus lives! Enjoy Easter for eternity. Jesus lives, and now you will live...forever. Amen.