

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

The Easter Encounter

Gospel Lesson

John 20:1-18 (NRSV)

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.

Bible/Sermon Focus

Evangelism is a loaded word for many Christians. For some of us, when we hear that word, we are flooded with images of sidewalk preachers holding bullhorns and promising us eternal hell fire if we do not believe as they believe. Images of door knocking and aggressive messages don't sit easily next to a God of love and peace. With as many ways as people have attempted to introduce the *Risen Lord & Savior* to others, it seems like very few have taken the time to ask, "How did the *Risen Lord & Savior* introduce himself to others?"

In this sermon series, "Encountering Christ: The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," we will ask just that. We will focus on the task of evangelism by considering how Jesus introduced himself in the post-resurrection accounts found in the Gospel.

In our first encounter, we meet Mary at the tomb. This is a well-known story, and like most well-known stories, we sometime tune out when we hear it, thinking there is nothing new to learn.

But let us consider what it means that empathy, compassion, and trust are at the center of this "Easter Encounter" between Mary and Jesus.

Mary is distraught. She is just looking for the body. Where is the dead body of Jesus? Where did they move him? She is engulfed in her pain and grief. What Mary doesn't need in that moment is to be handed a pamphlet and reminded that her world is lacking. Mary knows well that she is in pain. She knows well her grief of the past few days. She knows her loss. What she needs is what she receives from Jesus: empathy. What she receives from Jesus is compassion. He asks her, "Why are you crying?" And he doesn't do this as some kind of set up, but because he genuinely wants to know and to help.

There are so many people in this world who just need someone to ask them how they are doing ... and actually mean it when they ask. There are so many people who are crying and hurting and just need someone to show up for them.

In our empathy and in our compassion, we share the affects of our lives together. We meet people where they are and build relationship and community.

It is not our job to convert people. In Rob Bell's words, we are not gathering notches on some spiritual belt. Conversion is the job of the Holy Spirit. Our job is to love God, and to love our neighbor. If we are loving someone with an agenda, then it really isn't love.

Discussion Questions

1. Share your experiences around "evangelism."
2. What does it say about the nature of God that the risen Christ's first words were, "Why are you weeping?"
3. How are you working to love your neighbor more today, than yesterday?
4. What does healthy evangelism look like to you?
5. When was the last time you participated in evangelism?
6. How is your life and the way you live "good news" for those you encounter?

Prayer

Risen Savior, we thank you for meeting us where we are, in our suffering and in our joy. In our authentic selves we find your grace meeting us, and working in us and for us. Teach us to better love our neighbors. Make our very lives your good news in the world. Amen.

The first words of the resurrected Christ are words of empathy.