

**Sermon**  
**Kirk of St James**  
**Sunday April 20, 2025**  
**Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton**

When we were children my siblings and I loved to play hide and seek. The three of us would hide, and dad would look around and not find us. We would giggle, thinking we were the most brilliant children at hide and seek, and I now believe that what was really happening was that dad would stomp around looking for us for a couple minutes, then go downstairs and settle into his chair to watch a television show. Ultimately it worked out for all of us, Dad got quiet time, and we thought we were the best hiders ever. Now that I am a parent I understand. What is happening in John on this Easter morning is about a lot more than a body having disappeared.

Our story begins in the dark, which is appropriate based on how things were left on Good Friday. Poet and artist Jan Richardson says “I love that detail—that Easter began in the shadows, well before sunrise. This is the way resurrection works: it gathers itself in the darkness, beginning in such secrecy and hiddenness that when it happens, it can be difficult for us to recognize it at first.” That is how Easter works isn’t it? We leave together in the darkness of Good Friday and wait out the long hours until Easter morning. While it feels like nothing is happening or changing, the reality is that everything we know about the world is about to change.

In John’s account we have three people involved in the first Easter morning outside of Jesus and the angels. The first is Mary Magdalene, who sets out while it is still dark. For

anyone who has experienced deep grief or loss we know how disruptive it is to our lives. We can't eat, we can't sleep, we barely function. Mary had likely been tossing and turning all night, unable to close her eyes. Finally, she gets up, maybe she just wants to be close, maybe she hates the thought of Jesus alone in a cold tomb. Or perhaps it was just that nothing else felt like it mattered. She had no way of knowing she would soon have the honour of not only telling the disciples that Jesus had risen, but she would also be the first to see him. "If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a story about people seeing Jesus, they wouldn't have dreamed of giving the star part to a woman. Let alone Mary Magdalene." However, it is through her devotion and love that we have the good news of Easter morning. When she arrives to see the tomb is empty, she immediately tells Peter, and the beloved disciple who both respond in their own unique way.

In some ways these two disciples mirror Mary and Martha. The beloved disciple immediately runs to the tomb. They don't need to be convinced, they believe something has happened, and he is in such a rush to get there he doesn't wait for Peter. While we are uncertain of the exact identity of this disciple, we do know that he almost always represents the way we are supposed to respond to Jesus. He was the one who stayed until the very bitter end at the foot of the cross with the women. He responds quickly, and decisively, and fully. The moment he sees the empty tomb it is written that, "he believed." He might not have understood, but he believed.

Peter arrives a few minutes later and out of breath. Unlike the beloved disciple who hesitates outside Peter immediately goes in. Peter is hot and cold like this. One minute he

denies he knows Jesus, and runs away, and the next he is running to the tomb. Likely motivated by a host of complex emotions like guilt for his failures, fear for what might have happened, and maybe a sense of wonder. Peter demonstrates the complexity of our human lives.

The assumption would have been that the body was stolen for either political or other purposes. However, the scene that greets them does not support this idea. If it was people stealing the body they would not have taken the time or gone through the complexity of unwrapping it. It does not take Peter or the beloved disciple long to leave and discuss with the others what might have happened. They have missed the fact that what they have just witnessed echoes the raising of Lazarus just a week before with a few major differences. Lazarus needed people to roll away the stone and unwrap his body. Jesus did not need any help, instead, “Jesus had gone on, through death and out into a new world, a new creation, a new life beyond where death itself had been defeated and life, sheer life, life in all its fullness, could begin at last.”

Faithful Mary does not leave, sitting with her grief she becomes the first witness. Again, in John there is so much happening. When did the angels suddenly appear? And Mary, so distraught that even they cannot hold her attention turns away from them, she needs to find Jesus. Forget these two heavenly beings, she is on a mission. After a case of mistaken identity, she hears her name, and finally sees the truth, she might not fully understand it, but she accepts it. She cannot hold onto Jesus anymore, he will not be

walking the pathways and sharing meals with them in same way. Something has changed irrevocably, and the reality of that good news is just coming into the light.

N.T Wright sometimes laments that if you were to ask a Christian what the most important Christian day is, they would answer Christmas. However, if it hadn't been for Easter, nobody would ever have dreamed of celebrating Christmas. In this Easter story we see three faithful disciples witness the miracle of the best news ever told—he is not here for he has risen. And since that time, we celebrate the Good News of the resurrection of Christ. “An expected ending is now a beginning—of telling the truth about life to those who only want to deal in death, of offering living water and the bread of life to those who want only to buy and sell commodities that perish. Mary speaks, and in her speaking, we find our own voice.” The Good News of Easter has never stopped being told. The wonder of the empty tomb continues to shine light and hope into our lives. Friends, may we always celebrate the miracle of Easter, and may your darkest nights, always give way to dawn.