

# Sermon

## Easter Festival of the Resurrection

April 4, 2021

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Parkside United Church of Christ  
Phoenixville, Pennsylvania  
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### “Easter Intimacy”

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).  
—John 20:11-16

“Easter Intimacy.” I’m sure most of you remember that this sermon title is the same as last year’s Easter sermon title! But, be assured this is not a rerun! The Gospel text this year is from John’s Gospel; last year’s was from Matthew. The title is the same, but the text has changed. The title is the same . . . , but the world has changed from what we were Easter a year ago.

“Easter Intimacy” was very different last year. We were in a lock-down because a deadly virus of which we didn’t know very much was stampeding itself across the globe. Governor Wolf ordered a statewide closure of all "non-life sustaining businesses operations and services," with enforcement of this order going into effect at 12:01 am on Saturday, March 21. On Sundays, March 22 and 29, the doors of Parkside UCC at Third and Main were locked, and we all stayed home. Jennifer suggested that we try worship via ZOOM. I had no idea what ZOOM was, but I said, “OK by me,” and I thought we might get a handful of techy-types. But, on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020, worship began in a strange new way—totally virtual. And, there were more folks online than would have been here in person! For one year we have testified to the reality that we can be church even though the church was closed. Easter Intimacy was possible totally electronically. And, for almost exactly one year to the day (today is April 4), we have proven we can be church even when we couldn’t get into the church.

One year later Easter intimacy is beginning in a new way. Yes, some of us are back, but some are not. Sadly nine of our Parkside family have died since last March. And, we are still in grief as families and church family. There is an emptiness that surrounds us as we re-gather in this place. We find ourselves weeping like Mary at the empty tomb.

Some are not physically here because our Parkside family has been extended to people who can't be here physically due to distance and health issues. ZOOM has made our family bigger, and so we extend the intimacy which is a hallmark of Parkside electronically so that they can be with us here by the miracle of the Internet—when it works!

There are some folks who don't feel safe to gather, and the simulcast allows them to be with us, too. This service and, God willing, all from now on will be simulcast via ZOOM. We are church here and there whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey. An outrageous welcome awaits you either way!

Easter is intimacy, not just *about* intimacy, not just the psychological *feeling* of intimacy, not even the human *experience* of intimacy. Easter is the *reality* of divine and human intimacy. In John's gospeling, Mary of Magdala went to the garden alone. The stone guarding the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away sometime between Friday at sunset and her arrival before sunrise on Sunday. No corpse, just the funeral wrappings rolled up as though somebody had unwound them from Jesus' body. John goes into great detail. And, Mary—she's scared to death and runs as fast as she can to tell Jesus' disciples, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!" John and Peter run with her back to the tomb. They see the linens wrapped up and go back home. "Oh, maybe somebody must have completed the burial work they left unfinished on Friday before the Sabbath curfew; no big deal." The guys go home and leave Mary alone sobbing. She bends over and looks into the tomb. Two angels are there where the body of Jesus was laid on Friday. "Woman, why are you weeping?" the angels ask. She repeats again the litany, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." She turns around, and thinks it's the cemetery care-taker. "Woman, why are you weeping?" "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." . . .

"Mary!" And, in that mystical moment it's Easter, the day of resurrection. Divine intimacy of a woman with her risen Lord. "Mary!" Just her name—divine recognition, divine intimacy. Easter intimacy. But . . . a moment of divine intimacy is not to be held onto as some kind of privatized spiritual transaction. "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father,

to my God and your God.” The text continues, “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.”

John, the gospeler, says it all so matter-of-factly. Yet her proclamation, “I have seen the Lord” changed the world. Three words in Greek: “I have seen the Lord!” A woman’s three words set in motion a revolution. Women aren’t supposed to do that! In the first century A.D. women aren’t supposed to be prophets, priests, popes. It’s a man’s world, and a woman, albeit a “foreigner” from Magdala in Galilee near the border with Lebanon—a foreign woman in Jerusalem in her three simple words, “I have seen the Lord,” changed the world!

It was getting late on Easter. Two of the disciples—the men--were walking on the road to the town of Emmaus. They had heard Mary’s report, and they were discussing the events of the day with each other. It’s a long walk—somewhere around 7 miles. Somehow, somewhere on the walk to Emmaus a stranger joined them—common thing to happen in a day when the only means of transport for ordinary people was on two feet. The stranger started to do what rabbis do—interpret the scriptures. They remembered later how their hearts burned “while he was opening the scriptures to us.” Without a limp Bible in hand. Luke the gospeler continues: “As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. . . . Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” Easter intimacy. *It had to be told.* Like Mary in the garden the bread breaking had to be told. When Easter happens, you can’t keep quiet. It has to be told: “I have seen the Lord!”

The Word of God is the same—yesterday, today, and forever. . . . But, the world changes. Today—this Easter—is different from Easter last year. Covid has changed some of us—at least those willing to listen to scientific and medical advice, those willing to expose a bared arm to a needle or two, those willing to get beyond politics and keep on a mask and practice what some of us preach about social distancing. Last Easter we were locked down. Today we have done what we’re supposed to do to re-gather and to affirm to those who don’t feel safe or can’t because of distance and infirmity—to affirm that, as we have affirmed for a year that we still can be church even when some of us are together with us electronically. The Holy Spirit knows no boundaries! Divine intimacy knows no barriers. Christ meets us wherever we are, whoever we are. Christ is with us now . . . inviting *us* into Easter intimacy.

