**Hard questions**

A very warm welcome to all of you who are celebrating with us today-- here in person or over livestream. Jesus has risen! He has risen indeed! This is the focus of our worship and celebration on this Resurrection Sunday.

Jesus’ victory over sin and death is not only about hope for life after death. Because of the life that we have in Christ right now, we are united with him and invited to join him in healing the world. He is risen and he is with us!

But we live in this world where sometimes his presence isn’t obvious. It’s a world where suffering and joy appear side by side. Sometimes it’s hard to understand.

We Christians have plenty of questions that we would like answered. Today, on Resurrection Sunday, we might ask, “How exactly does God resurrect a person?” And that would be a relevant question, but it is a question that we won’t have answered right now. What are some other questions that we would like answered?

Wait for suggested questions or use the following prompts – 1) How is cancer cured? 2) What do we need to do to have world peace? 3) Why does a flamingo’s head have to be upside down when it eats?

There are some hard questions that won’t be answered until we see Jesus face to face, some things we won’t understand until then. It’s not easy living with hard questions, but our joy is in Jesus. We’re not the only ones who have lived without answers to the hard questions.

Today we remember the story of Mary Magdalene at Jesus’ tomb and watch her grief turn to joy as her questions about Jesus’ death are answered, while at the same time **new** questions arise about what it means to serve a risen Savior.

Let’s watch a short video about the resurrection using the words of today’s passage, found in John 20. See if you can identify the hard questions.

VIDEO of John 20:1-18

Let’s take a closer look at John 20 and identify some questions in this passage. We ourselves might ask these same questions when we are struggling with change, suffering or difficulties in our lives. Jn 20:1-2

*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. 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.” (**John 20:1-2 NRSV**)*

Here we observe Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb while it was still dark. When Mary sees the stone rolled away, she immediately wonders where Jesus is. Someone has taken him, and we don’t know where he is. Her question is,

**Where is Jesus?**

How often in life do we ask the same question – where is Jesus?

My parents or spouse or friend has serious health problems. I have serious health problems. Where is Jesus?

My car broke down and it’s going to cost more money than I have to fix it. Where is Jesus?

My landlord says I have to move. Where is Jesus?

I lost my job. Where is Jesus?

The people of Ukraine are being executed, raped, and their cities and homes are being destroyed. Where is Jesus?

Hard questions. Notice that in our passage Mary assumed Jesus had been taken; he was nowhere around. It seems like a logical explanation for the missing body.

When we’re faced with difficult situations, and ask, “Where is Jesus?” it’s easy to make assumptions like Mary did, based on our own logic. She thought, the body is not here. It must have been taken. In our own suffering we too might make assumptions saying, “It’s my fault” or “I’m a victim of injustice” or “I’m being punished.

But these are only assumptions. Instead of trying to figure everything out according to our faulty human logic, we should focus our attention on Jesus’ words and work.

In Mary’s case, when she realized Jesus was missing, she should have focused on Jesus’ words that he would be crucified and die but would rise on the third day.

Today, when we wonder “Where is Jesus?” we have Jesus’ words in the Bible to remind us where he is… that “*In him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28, *NRSV*). He’s in us!

Here are some more of Jesus’ words:

*“I’ve told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace.* ***In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties.*** *But take heart! I’ve conquered the world.” (**John 16:32-33**MSG)*

While we may ask the question “Where is Jesus?” we can live by the truth that he is alive, he is in us, and we live in him. Where is Jesus? **He’s in you and with you, always inviting you to join him in what he is doing.**

**This is the reason we celebrate the resurrection. Jesus is alive and in us; we no longer have to ask where he is.**

Let’s get back to our story in John 20 and identify another hard question.

*Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. (**John 20:3-10 NRSV**)*

These verses tell us what happened when Peter and John made it to the tomb. We read that John “believed,” but at that time he didn’t connect the dots that Jesus had told them he would rise from the dead. Right then, John believed Mary that Jesus was missing. He and Peter went home. Why didn’t they stay and try to investigate what happened to Jesus’ body?

The hard question they were asking was

**What do we do now?**

Think of the kind of week they’d had. After 3 years of living with and learning from their hero, the horrible predictions Jesus had made about the end of his physical life came true. Their hero and friend was tortured, beaten beyond recognition and crucified on a cross. They were numb with grief. Their hearts were broken.

Not only had they lost their friend and teacher, they grieved the loss of a future they had envisioned. They thought Jesus had come to bring the Father’s kingdom in their time. Loss of their hero. Loss of their future. Wondering if they would be killed next. No wonder they didn’t know what to do. No wonder they withdrew to a safe place and locked the doors.

What emotion makes us withdraw? It’s fear. When we’re asking “What do we do now?” we are often confronted with our fear of not knowing **what** we’re supposed to do next or **how** we’re supposed to do it. We’re tempted to withdraw just like the disciples did.

**The resurrection reminds us that Jesus has not left us to wonder what to do next.** Death comes to us in many ways throughout our lives: loss, disappointment, disillusionment.

Perhaps I have felt loss most profoundly in parenting. When something bad happens to me, it seems so much easier than watching the pain and losses being experienced by my children. You see, everything was going to be perfect for them in my plan. Ok, maybe there would be some failed tests, a few scraped knees, little things like that along the way that I could handle. But different lifestyle choices? Rejection of the faith they were raised in? Death of a marriage? These were disappointments and losses I didn’t anticipate, situations I could not control.

When we anticipate something and it doesn’t happen, it’s a kind of death. Death of our plans. Death of our expectations. Death of our agenda.

We are learning that we really don’t control anything. But if we think about it, **each time we have faced disappointment or loss, at the very bottom God’s grace has been there.** We have come through that smaller “death” to the other side because something or someone has always made a way for us. That’s the power of the resurrection. **Jesus reminds us that he claimed victory over death – over anything that can stop us from living in him.**

Back to the disciples’ question, and OUR question: What do we do now?

**We claim Jesus’ victory. We proclaim his life in us. We follow him; we participate in what he is doing in us and in those around us.** As the Great Commission reminds us, the one to whom was given all power and authority on heaven and on earth will be with us always. We are invited to join him in his mission of bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* ***And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.****” (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)*

What do we do now? **We wait for him to show up** – confident that he does. When he does, we join him in what he is doing. We rest our hope on Jesus. We proclaim him, we praise him, we worship, even as we struggle with hard questions.

Verses 11 -15:

*But 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.” (**John 20:11-15 NRSV**)*

Here we find Mary Magdalene weeping. The disciples have left, but she stays. She finally summons up enough courage to look into the tomb, and sees two angels who ask her…

**Why are you weeping?**

Mary shares her sorrow with them: Jesus is gone; I don’t know where he is. She seems to be so dismayed that that she doesn’t even really notice that two angels in white are sitting in the tomb, asking her questions. She just answers them, and then she turns around, and Jesus is there. He asks her the same question: Why are you weeping? She thinks he’s the gardener, but she answers the question again.

Did the two angels and Jesus himself not know why Mary was crying? I am guessing that they knew, maybe better than Mary did. Asking the question “Why are you weeping?” encapsulates the grieving process, shows the extension of compassion.

Human beings need to talk about their pain, disappointments, and losses. It’s part of the healing process that God created. Grief is not something that people “get over;” grief must be expressed through talking to someone, journaling, moving our bodies, or creating art and music.

Grief must be integrated into a person and talking about our losses can be a part of the process. When we are hurting from a loss or disappointment, answering the question “Why are you weeping?” helps us process and integrate the loss into our lives. It helps us heal and ultimately turns us back to the healer. **Jesus understands our pain, our suffering, our grief, and he enters into it with us.**

The resurrection reminds us that our weeping is for a moment; **the joy of knowing Jesus and knowing his resurrection is our resurrection encourages us to not grieve as others do, with no hope.** The resurrection reminds us that our grief will turn to joy because we know we have been risen with him and we have ascended with him.

The last questions we will consider are inferred by our text in v16-18

*Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 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.’” 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 20:16-18 NRSV**)*

Jesus says Mary’s name, and she instantly knows him. “Rabbouni!” she says. Though the scripture doesn’t say it explicitly, it’s implied that Mary embraces Jesus, and he says to her, “Do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father” (v. 17). This might sound a little cold; after all, who could blame her? The last time she saw him, he was dead on a cross. But it might make more sense if we understand Mary’s unspoken question to be

**Will life go back to the way it was?**

It’s a human tendency to resist change or to be nostalgic for “the good ole days.” It would be a natural assumption for Mary to think that Jesus could take up where he left off. But in any kind of death, coming out on the other side means that things are different. We are different. **The Holy Spirit uses the losses and suffering we endure to change us.** We already know, deep down, the answer to the question we’re asking, “Will life go back to the way it was?” The answer is, unequivocally, NO. And we, like Mary, must move forward into the vital question

**“Are we willing to change our vision of how life is supposed to be?”**

**“Are we willing to surrender to the changes God is leading us through and leading us to?”**

If we are going to participate in resurrection, our answer must be yes because resurrection implies a change.

Questions, questions. On this Easter Sunday, Resurrection Sunday we’ve considered these important questions:

Where is Jesus? He’s here, now, with us and IN us

What do we do now? We wait for him, and when he reveals himself we join him in his work, proclaiming him, praising him, looking forward with hope & confidence

Why are you weeping? Because we need to grieve life’s disappointments. Jesus joins us there

Will life go back to the way it was? No! Thank God! The resurrection reminds us that when Jesus rose from the grave, everything changed. Death lost its sting. The grave is not a permanent dwelling. There is life after death. There is HOPE.

Are we willing to change our vision of how life is supposed to be? This is your question to answer.

Jesus is alive, and because he lives, we too will live forever. The resurrection reminds us to live in our new reality – that we are a new creation, redeemed and reconciled to the Father. The resurrection reminds us that God’s promises are sure – just as Jesus rose from the grave, so will we. Just as Jesus entered into glory, so shall we. Just as Jesus declared victory over sin and death, we will declare victory. All because he is risen! **Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!**