

**Highland Presbyterian Church**  
**Easter Sunday; 9:00 am Service – April 5, 2026**  
**A sermon by Megan McCarty**

Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. John’s Gospel lingers there—in the darkness, in the confusion, in the quiet grief of a world that has not yet heard the good news. And perhaps that’s where many of us begin this Easter morning—not in bright alleluias, but in the shadows of uncertainty, loss, or longing.

Mary comes carrying love and sorrow. She expects death to be final. She expects the story to be over. When she finds the stone rolled away, her first response is not resurrection—it is alarm. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,” she says. Even when Peter and the beloved disciple leave, even when the evidence begins to mount, Mary remains outside, weeping.

And here is where the Gospel slows down, inviting us to pay attention. Mary bends to look into the tomb. She sees angels, but even this does not yet awaken hope. Her grief is too real, too immediate. Then she turns—and sees Jesus standing there. But she does not recognize him. She mistakes him for the gardener.

Isn’t that just like resurrection? It appears where we least expect it, in forms we do not immediately recognize. The risen Christ stands before her, alive and present, and still she does not know him.

Until he speaks her name. “Mary.” One word. Her name. And suddenly everything changes. The darkness breaks. The confusion clears. Death is undone—not just in some cosmic sense, but personally, intimately. She knows him because he knows her.

This is the heart of the resurrection story: not simply that Jesus is alive, but that the risen Christ calls us by name. In our Reformed tradition, we affirm that God’s grace comes to us before we can comprehend it. God knows us fully and loves us completely. Exactly as we are. The resurrection is not just an event to be believed; it is a relationship into which we are called. Like Mary, we are known. Like Mary, we are called. Like Mary, we are sent.

Because notice what happens next. Mary reaches for Jesus— “Rabbouni!” she cries—but he redirects her. “Do not hold on to me,” he says. The resurrection is not something to cling to as if we could contain it. It is something that sends us outward.

Mary becomes the first witness, the first preacher of Easter by saying: “I have seen the Lord.” In a world where her testimony would have been discounted, Jesus entrusts her with the good news anyway. The risen Christ overturns not only death, but also the boundaries and assumptions that limit who is called and who is sent.

And that matters for us. Because Easter is not just about what happened then—it is about what God is doing now.

Clarence Jordan is one of the founders of Habitat for Humanity and founder of the Koinonia Farm and intentional community. He writes that, “The resurrection of Jesus was simply God's unwillingness to take our "no" for an answer. God raised Jesus, not as an invitation to us to come to heaven when we die, but as a declaration that God's very self has now established permanent, eternal residence here on earth. God is standing beside us, strengthening us in this life. The good news of the resurrection of Jesus is not that we shall die and go home to be with God, but that Christ has risen and comes home with us, bringing all God's hungry, naked, thirsty, sick prisoner siblings at the same time.”

The same voice that spoke Mary's name speaks ours. The same risen Christ who met her in her grief meets us in ours. The same Spirit that sent her into the world sends us, too. We are called to be an Easter people—not people who deny the reality of suffering, but people who trust that suffering does not have the final word. Not people who have all the answers, but people who know the one who calls us by name.

Maybe today you are standing outside the tomb, like Mary—carrying grief, confusion, or doubt. If so, hear this: the risen Christ is closer than you think. Even if you do not recognize him yet, he is present. And he is calling your name.

Maybe today you need to hear that death does not win. War, destruction, gun violence, deportation, racism, inequity, loneliness, anxiety... they do not win. Despair is not the end of the story, because God is still at work, bringing life out of what seems lost.

Or maybe today you are being called, like Mary, to go—to share the good news in word and in action. To be a witness to resurrection in a world that feels stuck in Good Friday.

“I have seen the Lord,” she says.

Can we say the same?

Not because we have everything figured out. Not because we never doubt. But because, in ways both quiet and profound, we have encountered the living Christ—calling us, loving us, sending us.

On this Easter morning, we proclaim with joy: Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Alleluia. Amen.