

04.05 - CCV - Easter Sunday

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...”

John does not waste words, but what words he chooses! He could have said simply, “Mary went to the tomb.” Efficient. Economical. Perfectly acceptable. But no, John insists: “while it was still dark.”

And immediately, if we have ears to hear, something ancient begins to echo.

“In the beginning... the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep...”

Darkness again. Not just the darkness of an early morning alarm clock that nobody enjoys (especially not clergy on a Monday), but the deep darkness, the kind that belongs at the very start of everything... or perhaps at the end.

Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb in darkness because, as far as she knows, the story is over. Finished. Closed. Sealed with a stone and a Roman guard detail for good measure. If this were a modern production, the credits would already be rolling.

And yet, John is mischievous. He takes us back to Genesis not to tell us that this is the end... but to hint that something suspiciously like a new beginning is about to happen.

Now, let's be honest about Mary.

She is not coming to the tomb expecting a miracle. She is not skipping along singing, a song. No. She is grieving and she is probably wondering, “Who moved the stone?” before she even arrives.

And when she finds the stone rolled away, her first thought is not, “Alleluia!” but rather, “Oh no, grave robbery.”

Which, frankly, is very relatable. If most of us showed up at a grave and found it empty, our first thought would not be “Resurrection!” but “Call the authorities.”

So Mary runs. She runs to Peter and the beloved disciple, and they run too—one faster than the other, as John makes sure we all know (because even the Gospel writers occasionally enjoy a bit of friendly competition).

They look into the tomb, observe, and they go home.

But Mary... Mary stays.

And here is where the story slows down. Here is where the new creation begins to breathe.

She stands outside the tomb, weeping.

And then she looks in, and sees two angels. Now, this is already quite something. Most of us, encountering two angels, might at least pause the crying for a moment. But Mary is so overwhelmed that even angels cannot distract her from her grief.

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

“They have taken away my Lord...”

Then she turns and sees Jesus.

But she does not recognize him.

She thinks he is the gardener.

Now, this is where John’s theological humor becomes almost playful.

Mary is standing in a garden, speaking to a man she assumes is the gardener... but in a sense, she is not wrong.

Because where did the first creation begin?

In a garden.

And who walked in the garden in the cool of the day?

God himself.

Mary, in the half-light of dawn, in the lingering shadows of grief, encounters the risen Christ—and mistakes him for the gardener.

But John is winking at us: Yes, Mary... he is the gardener.

The gardener of a new creation.

The one who has come not merely to repair the old world, but to re-create it from within beginning in the darkness of a tomb, just as once God spoke light into the darkness of chaos.

And then comes the moment.

Jesus says one word:

“Mary.”

That is all.

Not a sermon. Not a theological debate. Not even a full sentence.

Just her name.

And suddenly everything changes.

“Rabbouni!”

Recognition bursts forth. The darkness breaks. The new creation dawns not with a grand cosmic spectacle, but with a personal call. The risen Christ speaks—and a human being is brought from confusion into recognition, from grief into joy, from darkness into light.

This is how the new creation works.

Not abstractly. Not impersonally. But by name.

And let’s not miss the joy here.

Because Christianity, at its heart, is not a gloomy religion. It is not a long sigh over a lost world. It is the announcement—almost the laughter—of a world made new.

The tomb is empty. Death has been undone. The gardener is at work again.

This is not merely “good news.” This is ridiculously good news.

The kind of news that makes you run—like Mary, like Peter, like John.

The kind of news that makes you misunderstand at first, and then laugh at your own misunderstanding.

The kind of news that turns tears into proclamation.

“I have seen the Lord!”

And notice: Mary becomes the apostle to the apostles.

She is sent.

“Go to my brothers...”

The new creation does not remain hidden in the garden. It begins there, but it does not stay there. It spills out. It moves. It is announced.

Just as in Genesis, God said, “Let there be light,” and the light did not politely remain in one corner, it filled everything.

So now, in this new beginning, the light of resurrection begins with Mary, and goes out into the world.

So what does this mean for us?

It means that wherever there is darkness - real darkness, the kind that feels like the end of the story - God may be closer than we think.

It means that the risen Christ may stand before us, unrecognized, speaking our name in ways we do not immediately understand.

It means that the garden is not lost.

And perhaps most importantly it means that the story is not over.

Not for the world.

Not for the Church.

Not for you.

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...”

Yes. But the light was already on its way.

And once God begins a new creation, not even death itself can stop it.

Amen.