

Have you heard the one about the farmer advising the preacher regarding length of sermons? He says, “If I have a truckload of feed ready for cows, but only 1/2 the cows come to the feedlot, do I feed them the whole truckload?” So, by that reasoning, if Easter has about 3 times the average attendance, shouldn’t I preach about 3 times as long as the average sermon??? I could start with the beginning of the Bible and tell the history of Israel, or I could just start with Jesus’ birth and tell about *his* life You can breathe a sigh of relief: I know Easter dinners and egg hunts for children are waiting, and I know they *are* a very important part of this day! So I will do my utmost to share just a *few* thoughts about the Resurrection story!

If we are honest, most sincere Christians would admit that we have lots of questions about the resurrection. We have not seen Jesus walking around, we have not touched him, nor do we speed dial him on our cell phone and hear an audible voice. Yet the book of Acts opens by stating that Jesus appeared to many people over a period of 40 days before finally being “lifted up” from the Earth, as seen by several disciples. The four gospels, the gospels “according to” Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have unique stories about Jesus appearing after his death. Why is this important? It indicates that they weren’t merely copying one another to support some made-up story. Differences in their stories and details indicate real experiences... as experienced or interpreted by each writer. Only the gospel of John has the story of “doubting Thomas” who Jesus let touch his wounds. Only Luke has the story of two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus, when a “stranger” comes alongside and like a good therapist asks them why are they so sad.

Our reading this morning is from John, and only from John, and it focuses on Mary Magdalene, as the first to meet Jesus, right outside the tomb. So let’s consider the details: At first Jesus looked to her like a gardener. Many questions come to mind... such as “what exactly was going on!” Why didn’t she recognize his face at first? Was he wearing a

hoodie? Or if she saw his face and did not recognize it, was it just *his Spirit* in a new face and body? Actually a similar thing happened in the Luke story when a stranger came alongside giving good “listening therapy,” and they did not recognize that it was Jesus. They even invited him to supper, and did not recognize him “until the breaking of the bread.” They must have thought: “this is the way *Jesus* gave thanks and broke bread!” Can Jesus come into someone else’s body by sending his spirit into someone else’s body? (This could be called the Holy Spirit). Or does he just “appear,” rather ghostlike, walking through walls, beaming down and beaming up, materializing and vaporizing, as in Star Trek?!

Many possibilities and interpretations! And I’ve come to the conclusion that we will never know the physiology, the science, of how Jesus appeared to his followers And I don’t really care if Jesus’ *Spirit* entered the gardener, or if a corporal Jesus could simply appear, with a different face and body. As with much of the Bible, the most important thing, more than the literal or scientific questions, is the *Spirit* of what happened! Mary Magdalene was clueless about this figure that looked like a gardener... asking him if he had taken Jesus' body away and if so, where did he put the body. It wasn’t until this gardener did what? He called her by name! “Mary” he said..... She must have thought: “What?? this gardener knows me??” You can imagine... the sound of this gardener’s voice was familiar, especially when she heard her own name called, and heard the question “Why are you weeping?” The *Spirit* of the encounter was one of genuine caring, and recognizing one another as close friends. We know that Mary Magdalene was known to have received healing from Jesus and did become a close follower.

I think the Mary Magdalene story of her encounter with Jesus is easy to relate to, especially at a basic psychological level: It is the greeting of a close friend, someone who knows you by name, someone who knows all about you, someone who knows your wounds and how you have healed, someone who addresses you by name with care and

love! Some have called this a “Divine Gaze!” We know it at many levels, perhaps even as a distant memory of when we were babes and a caring mother or father would look into our eyes with love and joy and laughter! Perhaps we have known such a look of love from a good friend or lover. Perhaps we see it or feel it with our pets?! They know our voice! They know us, and we know them! Jesus breaks through Mary Magdalene’s sorrow and confusion by calling her name, “Mary!!!” And she responds similarly, by calling him by name, “Rabboni,” (or “Teacher!”) They had reunited, and oh what Joy... to recognize and greet each other!

With the Bible, you often have to read between the lines, and imagine some of the rest of the details. What do we all do when we see a loved one that we haven’t seen in a long time? We usually give them a hug and feel the joy of reunion. Now, the Bible verse doesn’t actually mention an embrace, but John does say that Jesus said: “Do not hold me.” (Some versions say Do not “cling” to me). This one little line has so much relevance for us! The relevance for all time has to do with boundaries... We can imagine that Mary Magdalene wanted to give him one of those hugs that never ends! (The song says it well: “I’d stay in the garden with him... But he bids me go, through the voice of woe...)

Jesus wisely says, Hey, I need to be on my way. I have other people to see (not to mention a whole world that needs a lot of salvation!) He says, Hey, I need to keep making my way back to the Spirit world; I’ll be ascending back to my Father soon. Jesus tells her I’m going back to my Father *and your Father*, my God *and your God*... In other words: You have the same access to this spiritual life of victory; Stay open to it... I cannot be physically by your side any more, but I’ve passed along my healing power to you; you DO have the Spirit inside you, my Spirit. Like in many gospel stories, there is recognition of a Holy Spirit, access to the Divine spirit, even before the dramatic Spirit events of Pentecost. We are more than our physical bodies; we have an inner spirit, that can connect with the Divine spirit, to lead us into new life, new hope, even if it starts small like a seed.

In conclusion, we are not here to get proof of Jesus' physical resurrection and appearances after his death, 2000 and 20 years ago. No one can do that, and we have no video footage of it! But we can say that *His Spirit* is alive and infusing so many around the world. I'm not going to point to the enormous amount of evil in the world right now; but simply remind us of the saying that we are an Easter People in a Good Friday world... a people of Courage and Hope in a world of death and despair. Every little instance of Goodness, of Forgiveness, of Peacemaking, etc... is the Presence of Christlike spirit, the Presence of our Risen Christ.

This morning...We have multiplied goodness and joy!...It is a red-letter day, a Fiesta Day, a Celebration day, a Day for greetings of Peace and Good Will! But we know it cannot last forever; we cannot "cling to" this hour of cheerful greetings and songs of joy. Jesus says, "Do not hold me." We know that we return to our daily lives that have their share of hard work, conflict and sorrow. So we need to keep sowing small seeds of Christ's Spirit, and watch them bloom and grow! We need to do all the little things that show love and kindness to our friends and family... like today: even hiding eggs for children, or preparing delicious food for guests to enjoy. And as with Jesus' encounter with Mary, we need to face one another, with Divine gaze, with the good will and accepting love of our Risen Lord..... So...Let's turn to our neighbor right now, and say: (Name) (or "Friend"), "God *knows* you, and *loves* you!" Amen.