

DOORS OF HOPE IN THE DESERT

GOING BEYOND THE SERMON

The journey of life over the past year has revealed our fears, weaknesses, and needs. It has not been an easy year. It feels as if we journeyed through the desert. Many of us feel we are still there, while others of us are beginning to see the edge of the wilderness ahead. The Scriptures tell us that God always opens Doors of Hope in the deserts of our lives. But how do we discover those doors as we begin to emerge from the wilderness of pandemic? Are we willing to listen and learn the lessons that God teaches in the desert wilderness? The doors of hope are open; can we see them and move through them?

The prophet Hosea wrote these words from the Lord: . . . “That is when I will entice her to Me, lead her through the wilderness and speak to her heart. From there I will give her back her vineyards, and make the Valley of Trouble, the Door of Hope: there she shall respond as when she was young, when she came up out of Egypt. On that Day, says the Lord, you will call me, “My Husband,” and no longer, “My Lord.” (Hosea 2:14-16)

We long for the kind of intimacy with God that Hosea writes about. We long for connection with one another. The world needs to see communities of faith that move from captivity to freedom, from loneliness to wholeness, from alienation to community, from hostility to hospitality, and from fatigue to vitality. And when we all reach the end of our journey, we want to hear the word of the Lord that comforts us as we face death itself.

FEBRUARY 21

FROM CAPTIVITY TO FREEDOM - LUKE 15:11-32

FEBRUARY 28

FROM LONELINESS TO WHOLENESS - MATTHEW 26:36-56

MARCH 7

FROM ALIENATION TO COMMUNITY - LUKE 10:25-37

MARCH 14

FROM HOSTILITY TO HOSPITALITY - MATTHEW 5:43-48

MARCH 21

FROM FATIGUE TO VITALITY - JOHN 13:1-17

PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 28

FROM DENYING TO BEFRIENDING DEATH - JOHN 11:38-44

EASTER SUNDAY - APRIL 4

FROM GRAVES TO GARDENS - JOHN 20:1-18

DR. JOHN STEPHENS, LENT AND EASTER, 2021

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called on of the slaves and asked what was going on He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fated calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

The sermon title is “From Captivity to Freedom.” The Bible is filled with images of the terror of captivity and the freedom God always provides. We read about the Hebrew slaves being led to the Promised Land through the Exodus. Many passages refer to other instances of slavery, insisting that in Christ, there is no distinction between people – that all are free through faith in Jesus. We use today’s passage to personalize the metaphor of captivity. The Prodigal Son experienced a kind of bondage we can relate to – emotionally and spiritually he had spent all his resources to zero. The far country is his wilderness; breaking him open until he “comes to himself.” We can also relate to the older brother’s form of bondage – of rivalry, resentment, and unrealized expectations. The prodigal returns home, having squandered his inheritance, and the father immediately begins the process of fully restoring him to his freedom as a beloved

son. The older brother is offered restoration as well – the father pleads with him to come in the house and celebrate with the whole family.

A-Apply

Each week in this series, the “application” of the Scripture is a call to consider what we must go through to get from A to B. For instance, this week the sermon is titled, “From Captivity to Freedom.” Going from someplace to another involves moving through time, or space, or an experience. This week’s “through” is wilderness. The son had to go through the far country “wilderness” in order to find his true self – a beloved son of a generous father.

We hope this is what wilderness will do for us. During our common wilderness experience of pandemic, we have been removed the familiar comforts that felt like “home” to us – the congeniality of work colleagues, the physical presence and encouragement of church family, the nearness of extended family, the buzz of social gatherings, and the camaraderie we share as sports fans or concertgoers. We’ve been forced to examine what gave us comfort – and perhaps served as a crutch or filler for emotions and inner thoughts that could best be healed by seeing ourselves as we truly are and allowing our heavenly father to put his arm around us and usher us back in for a party given in our honor.

Take time to sit with your personal journey through the wilderness of pandemic and offer it to God. How do you sense God’s loving restoration?

What lessons have you learned from the wilderness of pandemic?

What word or phrase best summarizes what you have been “through” during the pandemic?

P- Prayer

Abba Father, I’m ready to be received, restored, and even celebrated, as your beloved child. Thank you for preparing a spiritual home for me. I want to stay there with you. In Jesus’s Name I pray, Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: Matthew 26:36-56

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. The Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled. “ Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Notice in the story of the Garden of Gethsemane all the ways in which Jesus is alone.

- The others are with him, but Jesus is separated in solitude with questions.
- He directed nine of the 12 to sit in one place.
- He took Peter, James, and John to a quieter place where he began to be grieved and agitated.
- He spoke to them about his pain and asked for their solidarity.
- He moves away from them and throws himself on the ground and begs God to be relieved of the impending agony, but remains obedient to his Father’s will.
- When he goes back for the support of his prayer partners, he finds them asleep.
- His agony includes personal loneliness of friends who do not understand him and cannot stick with him in his deepest pain. And yet, he is hopeful they will rally, and he asks them “stay awake and pray.”

- He repeats the process and finds them asleep a second time and a third time.

When Jesus, the world’s greatest teacher, says, “Are you still sleeping . . . the hour is at hand” it seems that he is trying to teach them one last lesson about being good students. There is a time for sleeping and taking your rest; there is also a time for pulling an all-nighter and going the distance. The disciples’ failure to support Jesus in the Garden forced Jesus to go through the longest night of his life alone.

A- Apply

Solitude is Jesus’ way “through” from loneliness to wholeness. Even though he begged his friends to watch with him during the longest night of his life, Jesus ultimately must face his time of deep searching for God’s will alone. If you have not yet experienced a time when literally no one is available to share your burden, you may have missed the deep consolation God offers those who seek spiritual guidance through solitude. See how Jesus comes out of the garden with a deep sense of purpose. After his night of searching deeply for both the will of God and for his willingness to obey, Jesus emerges fully able to face Judas and the arresting crowd with calm resolution. He has the power and compassion he needs to restore the ear of Malchus, the slave who was injured by Peter during the chaos of Jesus’ capture (read the parallel passages in Luke 22:39-53 and John 18:3-12). And he suffers, yet perseveres through the desertion of his friends.

Imagine the prayer conversation between Jesus and God in the garden. The Message translation says that Jesus “plunged into an agonizing sorrow” in the garden. What is causing you grief and sorrow that you would pour out to God in prayer and solitude now?

Notice how you feel as you name the biggest struggle of your life. What comfort and reassurance do you receive back from God?

P- Prayer

Lord, when my prayer partners are nowhere to be found, remind me that you are waiting to hear my prayer, guide me, and strengthen me. Here I am, Lord. Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: Luke 10: 25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend. ”Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

If anyone needed to be shown a “door of hope in the desert” it was the man Jesus describes in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Anyone who traveled down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho in those days could expect trouble. The road itself covers 18 miles with a drop in elevation from about 2,500 feet above sea level to about 820 feet below sea level. The road was notoriously dangerous. This man encountered robbers, who not only stole from him, but they also assaulted him and left him for dead. And then, when not one, but two “holy” men pass by, you would think at least one would “open a door of hope” for the man by helping him. The priest represents the highest religious leadership among the Jews. He moves away upon seeing the wounded man. The Levite, also a member of the clergy, does the same. The Samaritan, whose people had been rejected religiously, culturally, and geographically by the Jews, did what the first two passersby would not. He was moved with pity; he drew near to the man; he touched him, bandaged him, ministered to him, put him on his animal, brought him to an inn and got him settled there and RETURNED the next day to pay the bill plus any out-of-pocket expenses that the innkeeper incurred. In other words, the Samaritan went above and beyond to help the wounded man.

A- Apply

The way “through” in this parable is the way of kindness. John Stephens writes, “There is a move through kindness that we both extend and receive – the man who is beaten must receive aid and the man who is helping must reach out and act. Both the man on the side of the road and the Samaritan were alienated. Notice at the end of the story that both are surrounded by community at the inn.

In today’s language, this story involves both a care-receiver and a caregiver. When a situation reaches the point that someone need special care, usually a good bit of alienation has occurred already. The person in need has withdrawn

from society in some way and the caregiver is likely facing withdrawal from his or her usual routine and personal contacts in order to provide care. Kindness is needed by both parties for the relationship to be productive. The community created in the midst of a healthy care plan brings joy and hope to all concerned.

Galatians 5:22 describes the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul says, "there is no law against such things" and in the next passage he reminds us to "bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Who needs to receive kindness from you? Be specific. How will you show kindness?

How might you humbly receive kindness from someone? Be specific. How will you accept the kindness?

How could this sort of exchange draw you deeper into community?

P-Pray

Lord, give me eyes to see and draw near to someone in need. I trust You to provide the means of grace for any situation I encounter on the path from alienation to community. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

This section of the Sermon on the Mount contains Jesus’ central teaching to love your enemy. In his exhortation, Jesus is redefining relationships and love. The New Oxford Annotated Bible notes on this passage and the parallel one in Luke explain that “Jesus demands love and forbids spite or retaliation.” He demonstrates this quality in his own life, particularly from the cross when he prayed, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” His follower Stephen shows us that we also can live in this manner, as he prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies while being stoned to death. (Acts 7:20) In Jesus’ ethics, no one is in the excluded category when it comes to love.

It is noteworthy that this passage and Matthew 19:21 are the only two occurrences of the word “perfect” in the Gospels. In Matthew 19, Jesus teaches the rich young man to keep the commandments, including love your neighbor as yourself and if he wishes to be “perfect” he must go, sell his possession, and give the money to the poor. The high standard of loving neighbors, others, and enemies comes from God, the heavenly Father, who is perfect.

A-Apply

John Stephens points out that “Life comes from love and love is not predicated by the other’s worthiness but by the state of our hearts.” The way “through” from hostility to hospitality is love. When I read passages in the Bible with a high call to holiness, I can quickly move to a place of self-condemnation. When I contemplate hospitality, I realize that 99 percent of the time, the invitations I extend for dinner, for fellowship, or for fun are to family and close friends; therefore, I must be selfish. Likewise in my prayer life -- I confess that I haven’t actively prayed for my enemies this week.

Jerry Webber suggests we start on this deeper journey of discipleship with deeper self-awareness like I am describing, but going even further than acknowledging our failure to meet Jesus’ standard. On the topic of love, he offers these questions for reflection:

What is the source of the love within me I feel for family, friends, and neighbors? Can I trace this love to its roots inside me?

And what about the hatred I feel for a certain person, or persons, or groups of people? What is its source? Can I trace this hatred to its roots inside me? Can I see its darkness, without being overwhelmed by shame?

P-Pray

Perfect Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me. May this time of study and reflection lead me to actively showing love to my enemies – for the first time or the thousandth time. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Holy Week @ Home

This week's sermon theme, "From Hostility to Hospitality" is a call to action — to extend grace to all. And, since our homes are typically where hospitality is extended and most certainly the centerpiece of gatherings during the pandemic, we want to offer new ways to commemorate Holy Week. This year, the Discipleship Ministries at Chapelwood have developed

a

Holy Week @ Home kit. The kit includes items for creating a simple altar, daily scripture, suggestions for sharing meals as a family and keepsakes to keep your mind and spirit focused on Jesus and his journey to the cross.

We pray your experience of Holy Week – from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday to Good Friday – and the joy of Easter will be deepened by using the *Holy Week @ Home* kit in your own unique way.

You may reserve your kit today for \$5. The kits will be available for pick up at Chapelwood's Greenbay campus beginning Sunday, March 21, through Thursday, March 25.

Go to www.chapelwood.org/holyweek.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: John 13:1-17

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, ^[a] took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, ^[b] but is entirely clean. And you ^[c] are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants ^[d] are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

It is understandable that Jesus and the disciples would be fatigued when they arrived at the specially prepared Upper Room for their Passover meal. Trace the emotional and physical highs and lows they had recently experienced. "John shows Jesus at the high point of his earthly ministry: he's raised Lazarus from the dead, crowds of people hail him as the Messiah as he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and at the feast the Father speaks audibly in a thunderous voice affirming him (John 11-12). Now the disciples and everyone are expecting Jesus to exert his power and authority as Israel's Messiah-Deliverer. So what a shock it is for the Twelve at their private Passover Feast with the Lord when he takes the posture of a lowly servant and washes their dirty feet! Not only had none of them done this, but they had also argued about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24)," writes Bill Gaultiere in Ignatian Meditation Guides, p. 42 (SoulShepherding.org)

This story that follows serves a two-fold purpose for the disciples and for all Christ-followers. In John 13:4-11, we see a one-time status transformation of the disciples in which Jesus cleanses them for what is to come. He is fatigued, facing death, and those who will take up his mission and ministry will need all the readiness and fit-ness for ministry that Jesus can supply. When he explains his actions, he is showing them that in his kingdom, the greater serves the lesser. Because Master and Teacher Jesus washed their feet, they (and we) will also be called to serve the ones the Lord will send to them.

A-Apply

Allowing Jesus to minister to us is a significant moment that can lead us from fatigue to vitality. The way “through” is service. Both the one who serves and the who is served are transformed. But being served can be confusing for those who usually do the serving/leading in life – like it was for Peter. Gaultiere’s Ignatian Meditation Guides include a prayer practice called “Ask for the Grace.” For this passage it reads: “Father God, I desire the grace of sorrow, regret, and confusion because of my sins that send Jesus to the cross.” Perhaps these were the kinds of thoughts flashing through the mind of Peter when it was his turn to have his feet washed by Jesus.

As you spend time imagining Jesus washing your feet, will you receive the grace God offers you – both in your awareness of sin and in your willingness to receive the unconditional love of Christ?

Remember a time when your vitality was restored through serving others. What changed in your thoughts and feelings as you turned your attention to someone else in need?

P- Prayer

Jesus, I offer myself for your cleansing touch. May it revitalize me to serve others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: John 11:38-44

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Jesus and his disciples were at the Jordan River at the site of his baptism when a messenger told him that his dear friend Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was deathly ill. But Jesus delayed going two more days. Jesus told his disciples he would raise Lazarus from the dead! Furthermore, when he arrived, he told Martha, "I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all," summarizes Bill Gaultiere in Ignatian Meditation Guides, p. 38. (For the full story, read John 10:40 – 11:37.)

After delaying coming to Bethany for several days, when he does arrive, "Jesus steps toward the tomb and moves toward death, not afraid to go to death to speak to it," says John Stephens. Jesus shows Mary and Martha and all his followers that death can be faced head on. He too, is about to do so. In the next scene in John's Gospel, Mary, having learned about death from Jesus, anoints his feet for his own death. This Biblical family composed of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany and their close friend Jesus of Nazareth have moved together through grief to death to life and are prepared to face death again with deeper faith, hope, and love.

A-Apply

The way "through" denying death to befriending death is to face death head on. During pandemic times, the world has walked this path. Many families have confronted the death of a loved one for the first time. It is difficult and scary. The pandemic took away the mercy we can offer to dying persons of staying by their side. It is a hard mercy to offer, but not having the choice due to the virus has highlighted the importance of this ministry. Those who have not been touched by the pandemic may experience an even greater gap between life and death going forward.

Journal about your experiences with death. How did you face the impending death of a loved one?

How did you deny it?

At any point in the process, did you experience the nearness and comfort of God?

If not, can you bring the past experience to the Lord in prayer now, asking the Holy Spirit to show you where God was present in your trauma and grief?

P-Pray

Divine Majesty, I desire the grace that you move my will to choose what will bring the greatest glory to Christ and will further your salvation for myself and others.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.**S—Scripture: John 20:1-18**

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.² 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.”³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;¹² 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.¹³ 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.”¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).¹⁷ 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.’”¹⁸ 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.

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

When reading this action-packed scene, look for the verbs. What are Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and the other disciple doing? First, Mary *shows up* while it is still dark. She *sees* that the stone has been removed from the tomb and then she *runs* to *tell* Peter and the other disciples, who *run* and *see* what Mary saw for themselves. Whereas Peter and the other disciple return home, Mary remains by the empty tomb. She *weeps* and *looks* in again. Then she begins to *see* amazing things. Two angels are sitting where the body of Jesus had been (His body is what she expected to *see*.) She *tells* the angel as much, and then she turns around and *sees* Jesus. Not knowing it is him, she *talks* to him, too! And when she *hears* him call her by name, she *talks* to him with new understanding. When she completes the mission Jesus gives her to *testify* about what she has seen and heard, she concludes by *saying*, “I have seen the Lord.”

Jamie Clark-Soles, in her book “Reading John for Dear Life,” says “Mary boldly asks for help with what she thinks she needs: the body of her dead Jesus. She gets even more than she is hoping for: the voice of her living Lord. In a Gospel that insists that Jesus knows each and every one of us by name and that we, his sheep, know his voice, it’s not surprising that it’s when he says her name, ‘Mary,’ that she ‘comes to,’ out of her fog of grief, and *sees* (italics mine) the reality of the joy in front of her.” (p. 137)

A-Apply

The way “through” from graves to gardens for Mary Magdalene is by seeing. She arrived at the tomb, wanting to see the body of Jesus. Death is what she expected and preparing a body was her task. When she does not find what she expected she stays in the graveyard and continues to investigate. She seeks and searches for answers. And she is rewarded. She sees angels and speaks with them. She sees Jesus and speaks with him and touches him. She receives an instruction from the resurrected Lord and obeys it with her testimony to the other disciples. Her grief is soothed and transformed into great joy. As Clark-Soles writes, “Mary Magdalene is the first to testify that the resurrected Jesus Christ is the central fact of human history – no, *cosmic* history. Can you hear her voice?”

God may be calling you to move from a grave to a garden in your own life. How might you pay better attention to the Gardener Jesus in the days ahead?

What does the empty tomb of Jesus of Nazareth mean to you?

How do you testify to the presence of God in your life?

P-Pray

Risen Lord Jesus, On this Easter Sunday, I worship you as the one who defied the grave and yet, knows me by name. Thank you for the grace to see you with eyes of faith. May I testify to your name, your goodness, and your glory today and every day. Amen.

*Going Beyond the Sermon is written by Teresa Rossy, Director of Grow Ministries,
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Source material is quoted throughout. The sermons are streamed online and worship is in person at 9:00 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary of our Greenbay campus. Go to www.chapelwood.org for details.

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