

040923 Sermon "Because He Lives" John 20:11-18

1. Calendars can be tricky. This morning we've got at least three calendars going at once. There's the secular calendar, and it is the ninth of April, the 99th day of this year. Then there is the liturgical calendar: this is the calendar by which much of the church marks the seasons and celebrations of faith, and by the liturgical calendar this is Easter Sunday . . . right after the Lenten Season. And then there is the Fairfield Grace UMC calendar, uniquely it's a joint service Sunday, the 10 o'clock English speaking congregation and the 1 o'clock Korean speaking congregation including Sunday school and youth worship together as one in the Lord.

Without question, it is Easter but for the church every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Getting the time right was very important for the first Christians. Jesus died on Friday, they knew that; and they also knew that he rose again on the third day, on Sunday. So, for Christians Sunday, not the Sabbath, not Saturday, became worship day . . . the Lord's Day.

Early on the third day, early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. Mary wanted to finish the job of anointing the body. When she arrived, she found the tomb empty. According to the Gospel of John 19, when Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus down from the cross, they were in a hurry to bury Him, since it was almost the Sabbath. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. They laid Jesus there.

In distress, Mary panicked, thinking the body might have been stolen. She hurried to find the disciples for help. So, Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Peter came and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth. Yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

When they left, Mary was still there, apparently too distraught to understand or even take in what was going on. The absence of the body is still all that

Mary can think about. It seems like she hardly even realizes that she's talking with angels. Maybe her tears blurred her vision...maybe her sadness was just too great. All of her hope seemed to be lost. Don't we often experience that too? When our circumstances are so bad, or when we are so emotionally drained, we experience difficulties in feeling God's presence.

Again, Mary has trouble recognizing who is before her. At first, she thinks Jesus is the gardener. When He says her name, though, Mary understands who is speaking. Her Lord, her teacher, her Messiah. Imagine that deep sorrow, suddenly transformed into joy, realizing that His body wasn't missing—on the third day He rose again from the dead! She was told to go tell others what she had seen. She must have been full of excitement to share the good news!

2. Today we sang "In the Garden". I'm sure many of you in this room will find this hymn to be your favorite hymn. As you may know, this hymn was written by Austin Miles. As he meditated on the story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the garden, early on the third day, on the morning of the resurrection, he felt as if he were standing there witnessing the intimate friendship between Mary and the Lord. Reverently he thought, "This is not an experience limited to a happening almost 2000 years ago but it is the daily companionship with the Savior that makes up the Christian's daily walk." The words and music he wrote following that experience became one of the most loved Gospel hymns of all time.

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

The Rev. Dr. Steve Hayner, former president of Columbia Seminary, passed

away at the age of 66 in 2015. He had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and the prognosis was not good. During these few months Steve posted his reflections on the web from time to time, what it meant to trust in the God who in Jesus Christ is with us in our suffering and our death. In one posting, Steve asked himself whether he's depressed, and confessed that of course he got discouraged and then goes on: "Unfortunately in our culture, there is still a kind of shame connected with depression, as if we should never experience it. And after all, I'm the guy who signs every letter with "joyfully." But joy is dependent on who I am and how I am loved more than on my circumstances. It is happiness that takes the hit when circumstances go bad. Not joy. Our circumstances are just too variable to be the foundation of our daily feelings about life. It's way too easy to equate "blessing" with circumstances instead of with God's loving embrace!"ⁱ

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, during last Lent, we made an intentional journey deep within ourselves and asked God's help for us to live a life led by the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:38-39 the apostle Paul said, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Fairfield Grace, May God's grace, peace, goodness, mercy, and joy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.

ⁱ Steve Hayner and Sharol Hayner, *Joy in the Journey: Finding Abundance in the Shadow of Death* (Downes Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 80.