

# EASTER - APRIL 12

**Describe a time when you were surprised because you thought you knew something - and what you knew turned out not to be the case after all.**

*Note: If you are with a group, have each person take a turn sharing.*

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

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 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.'" 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.*

## **Reflection**

Mary Magdalene thought at least she knew how to mourn. For all that she might not understand about Jesus' last days or why his life came to such a brutal end, at least she knew how to mourn.

That's why she came to the tomb: there were prescribed rituals for burial. These rituals were most often women's work. Mary knew them. Performing them was an act of caregiving. It would be one last way she could honor Jesus, one final chance to show her love. After all that had been taken from her, she thought she could at least give that.

But when she arrived at the tomb, she discovered even that possibility had been taken from her. And she wept for all her losses: the loss of her friend, companion, and teacher; the disappearance of his body; and the stolen chance for her to provide care.

Maybe you're experiencing compounding losses now, too. The COVID-19 pandemic is changing our lives profoundly, and there is much to mourn. Schools being canceled for a month, or the remainder of the academic year, might create real sadness. Maybe you're missing birthday parties, or soccer games, or music festivals. Maybe your favorite restaurant is closed, your local park has "no entry" signs posted, your big plans – or your small ones – are erased from the calendar. Maybe you just long to see a friend's face in person, not behind a mask, not on a screen. Maybe you're missing out on the special ways your church and family typically celebrate Easter. Maybe even though the sun is shining and the flowers are blooming, you feel tired, and sad, and uncertain.

In some ways, we are like Mary at the tomb on that first Easter. We thought we at least knew how to mourn, how to help each other through: gather in community, offer a gentle hand, a warm hug, some sign of presence and care. Even that is different now.

When Jesus appears to Mary, she doesn't recognize him at first. Her tears blur her vision. Her knowledge of reality – the fact that the dead stay dead – keeps her from imagining that the one standing before her might be the friend she mourns.

When Jesus speaks her name – "Mary!" – everything she thought she knew is both undone and reaffirmed. The powers that killed Jesus had not won, after all. The violence that seemed triumphant turned out not to be the stronger force. Her hopelessness in the wake of this loss began to disappear. She



John 20:1-18 · illustratedministry.com

is recognized. She is known. She is commissioned to share the Good News that life and love have the last word.

Maybe the good news this Easter is that even though parts of the world as we knew it are being undone, these eternal truths are reaffirmed. Like Mary, we are recognized and known, by the One whose life and love renews each of us and all the world. **ALLELUIA!**

### Discussion Questions

1. What is different about your life within the last month or two? What has remained the same?
2. What are some losses you are mourning?
3. What does it mean to you to hear your name?
4. Where do you see new life and love around you?

### Prayer

Dear God, we give thanks that you know us, and all the world, and that you love us, and all the world. When we are sad and uncertain, remind us that there is no power greater than your love. **Amen.**

