

## 10:00am Sermon: A Peculiarly Curious Miracle

Year A, Easter

[Jeremiah 31:1-6](#); [Psalm 118:1-2,14-24](#); [Colossians 3:1-4](#); [John 20:1-18](#)

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I have another job besides this one. I work at MIT with a bunch of engineers. It's a great gig for a minister, because people of faith and engineers are really similar. No I mean it in all seriousness. People of faith and good engineers are curious. They're deeply interested in figuring out how they can change this world, given their particular skills and talents. And it's not just engineers, right? Good coaches and carpenters, shipping clerks and singers are curious and are out to make change in this world. Almost all of us are looking to live lives of meaning and purpose and curiosity is key to that.

So I was getting coffee at MIT this week, and one of the engineers asked me, right out of the blue, as the machine was spitting out the last of her coffee, "Do you really believe he came back to life?" It wasn't confrontational, she wasn't trying to provoke me. She was just quietly curious. "Yeah," I said, as I set up my cup of coffee. "How come?" Now there are many true answers to that. But knowing her, not super well, but enough, I answered, "Because it lets me see the miracles I live with every day."

I know. You're wondering if I've seen the news. Yes, I have. And it's a miracle to me that people would be willing to go to Syria and Iraq and share the horrors they saw with the rest of us. It's a miracle to me that so many good and honorable people are willing to work so hard in the face of such challenges to do what they can, so the weak and vulnerable are not crushed by the rich and powerful. And it's a miracle to me that so many people live their own lives with the news in the background, still pushing forward to find the meaning and purpose in their own lives and don't just give up.

To live a life of meaning and purpose, I have to be able to see that our lives make a difference or else what's the point. For me, by looking at stories from the Bible, I get to see other lives that have made a difference for thousands of years. As scientist, because I am that too, I believe in evolution, a process that works over the long haul. Evolution eliminates stuff that doesn't serve a purpose. For Christianity to have survived and thrived for as long as it has, means that there is something powerful there for evolution to work with. By looking at the Bible stories and finding connections to my own life, I'm finding ways to connect my life to the kind of power that endures and changes lives and changes the world. We could all use a bit of that.

We see one of those lives today: Mary Magdalene. She is weeping. It says that four times. And we get it. It's so human. We love a particular person, as a friend, as a teacher. We love where they took us, what they showed us in the world. We love the tone of their voice and the way they raised their eyebrows when someone was being a little pretentious. Our relationship with that person is unique, because they are unique and we are unique. We love them. And now all those particular things we loved are gone. We can't even lay a hand on the person we love again. Because everything that takes on flesh passes away. So we weep.

The gulf between us and God is so huge, we're afraid God doesn't understand what it is like to live in this particular body building these particular relationships with these particular people. We're afraid God doesn't understand or even care why we're weeping. We're afraid that God

sees the world as averages over time. But lives of meaning and purpose can't be built on average. They have to be built on curiosity and love.

Think about Jesus' story. Not the Easter story, but the Christmas one. God took on flesh and lived among us. Sure, that's an assurance that God understands our fear. It's more than that. It's God putting into action that not only does God see us as particular individuals, but that God is seeking to have a unique relationship with the particular individuals we are. God came into this world as an individual to form relationships with individuals. God took on all the limitations of a body to make sure we understood that individual, particular ... bodies matter that much to God.

Now look at the Easter story. Jesus calls Mary by her particular name. "Mary" he says. By hearing him say her name, she recognizes him. She recognizes the relationship. And that the relationship is not over. She responds, "Rabbouni". She doesn't say his name, she names their relationship. "Teacher," she says, meaning that she is a student, a disciple. That's her particular relationship with Jesus. He calls *her* name and asks her to tell everyone what she witnessed. That is her life's new purpose and meaning. She's the only one who was the first to recognize Jesus after his Resurrection. She believed in a relationship that lasted beyond the life of a particular body. Her life of witness is built on something we all have. Look at the Flower Insert in today's bulletin. We know that even when the body passes away the relationship remains. We can still call the names of those we love and remember that love leaves behind more than death can take away.

Mary reaches out, just like all of us would, to touch him. He had been killed, and then his body taken away. It hadn't been properly cared for. She had come before daybreak to wash and anoint his body, to offer one last loving act. She was weeping, frightened and confused, wanting to do what she had set out to do, to care for him, to touch him one last time. Because we all know that feeling. We want to touch them one last time. And we know the real anguish is waiting for us, that searing pain when we really let go of them.

Yet here he is, alive. She reaches out, and he says, "Do not hold onto me." He knows what she's feeling; he took on flesh and lived among us. He knows it would comfort her to touch her, to give her a hug. Jesus was fully human and fully divine so we would understand that all bodies matter to God, that God sees each of us as particular individuals and has a particular relationship with each of those individuals. Jesus was fully human and fully divine so we would understand even as all bodies pass away, this life is not all there is. He comforts her not with a touch but by saying, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' (John 20:20). We may be transformed. But we particular individuals survive.

So that is the Easter question. Can we see the miracles that surround us, of this particular human, of that particular relationship? That is the lesson of following this particular teacher, Jesus. He will guide us to find lives of meaning and purpose in this world. Can we stay curious long enough to love the particularities of the flesh, to live with the fact that this flesh we so love is going to pass away? That all the miracles of this world are going to pass away. Except for the last curious, particular miracle we have been promised. That we will ascend to his God and our God. Can we hear Jesus calling our name to this final miracle that was made just for us, for each one of us, individually?