

10:00am Sermon: No Explanation Needed

Year B, Easter

[Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1-18](#)

Offered April 1, 2018 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I thought I would just lay out the theological, exegetical and eschatological implications of today's reading from the Gospel of John.

Yeah. Me either. You don't want to hear that. I don't want to preach it.

But that's what we do as humans in the face of a weird, frightening, unusual experience. We want our big, beautiful brains to understand it. Because then we feel like we can control, or manage or just live in a world that has such a weird experience in it. We're wired to want to understand.

In the reading from John, Jesus is with someone who is facing a weird, frightening, unusual experience. Mary saw him die on the cross, saw his body taken away, but not cared for properly. So she has shown up here, in the garden, by herself to do right by Jesus of Nazareth, a person she loved. She is grieving his death. When she finds the rock moved away and the body missing, the whole awful experience is getting worse. Why would anyone do that? What more indignities could anyone inflict on this guy who was telling us to love God and love each other? Nothing makes any sense. Maybe if this gardener dude has moved the body and she can sort it out, she can get this whole nightmare back on some kind of predictable track she can understand.

Jesus doesn't go into some intellectual explanation of the implications of the Resurrection. He just calls her by name. "Mary," he says. Her name. The one word that sums up who she is as a unique individual.¹ And isn't that what we are all looking for? A relationship where we seen for who we are.² We are longing for a relationship where our interior lives, our bodies, our histories, our dreams and losses³ form the foundation of that relationship. Yeah. I mean I know there are days where I don't anyone looking in my silverware drawer, let alone the inside of my soul. But when you get right down to it, most of the time we are all looking for that deep relationship.

God's looking for that too. With us. God took on flesh, came into this world as a specific individual who had relationships. Not as some kind of proof of concept that God has some generic intention toward this world.⁴ God comes into this world to take on the whole enchilada of what it means to be human.⁵ Being human means having relationships, means longing to have deep relationships where we are loved. Not generically. Not on average. But specifically, me, you, Melanie, Gary, Kevin. Little Miss Jocelyn in her poofy Easter dress. Jesus is offering that. Jesus is calling to us. Out loud. In his unique voice. "Mary," he says. In this moment for which there is no play book, no rule or ritual for how God is supposed to reveal God's self after coming back from the dead, Jesus chooses to underline how important the relationship with a particular

¹ Serene Jones, "Easter Day, Theological Perspective, John 20:1-18" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 378.

² Jones, "Easter Day, Theological Perspective, John 20:1-18", 378.

³ Jones, "Easter Day, Theological Perspective, John 20:1-18", 378.

⁴ Karoline Lewis, *John: Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 237.

⁵ Lewis, 237.

individual is to him. How important the relationship with a particular individual is to believing in him.⁶ “Mary,” he says.

And she hugs him. Of course she does. That’s what we do with specific individuals we love. So Jesus moves on to the second lesson on that first Easter morning. He tells her not to hold on. Resurrection is the first step, but it’s the Ascension that matters.⁷ It’s the returning to God that’s important. He wants her to hold onto the important thing, *ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.* (John 20:17) We are all returning to God. Whatever your big beautiful brains imagine that to be like, you can’t imagine it. So let go.

Finally he tells her to go and tell. An encounter with God requires a response.⁸ Mary has had a doozy of an encounter. But if our physical, emotional, historical beings matter, then we will encounter God every day, in smaller moments. As a church, during Lent, a group of us read about the 33 Chilean miners trapped and freed in 2010. How is that church book? It’s not. But Church is about building up our skills of understanding the nature of our relationship with God in this life, in this world. So we read about how the miners survived and kept themselves sane and faced the physical and emotional challenges both while they were trapped in the mine and later after they were rescued. We read that book together and we ask what it has to teach us about our lives here in Brookline, NH when thankfully we are *not* trapped 2,000 feet below the surface of the earth. And we find connections with God in our daily lives because we reflect on their experience.

Our relationships with each other and with God are built on our physical, emotional, historical beings. So the photo booth we’ll have going after church matters because we can remember this day. Coffee hour after church matters because the sweetness of the cookies and the heat of the coffee remind us of the feast God has laid out for us. There’s an insert in your bulletin with a list of upcoming events. We do take home meals, where we make a meal and for \$10 you take it home (*we have marketing and branding geniuses in this church*) and stick it in your freezer. And on a day when you cannot face deciding what is for dinner, you take it out and have a homemade meal. April’s meal is Thanksgiving meatballs. And they are crazy good, on a bed of mash potatoes. Seriously. I know Isaiah talked about *rich food filled with marrow* (Isaiah 25:6), but he hadn’t had the turkey meatballs. I’ll put in a plug that there’s a pre-order sheet downstairs. You do not want to miss them.

Turkey meatballs matter. Chocolate for breakfast matters. Jesus comes to us through the senses in this world.⁹ Sitting in the space where our senses are alive and we are more open to God’s relationship with us matters. The taste of the grape from communion, the smell of the polish on the pews, the sound of a favorite hymn landing on our heart, the feel of the Bible as it sits open on our laps.¹⁰ All these matter. Because the physical reality of this world matters. God is reaching towards us for a relationship. God is calling our names, one after another, personally, specifically, uniquely. A life of faith is about honing those skills that allow us to see how God is reaching for us in the middle of life today. Here in this world. A life of faith is about hearing

⁶ Lewis, 237.

⁷ Lewis, 242.

⁸ Lewis, 237.

⁹ Jones, “Easter Day, Theological Perspective, John 20:1-18”, 380.

¹⁰ Jones, “Easter Day, Theological Perspective, John 20:1-18”, 380.

God calling our name throughout all the normal work of our lives, about letting go of what we imagine in order to hold onto what is most important, and about responding to God's call.

The Resurrection isn't something we'll understand. It's just God calling us by name. With infinite love. Forever. No explanation needed. Alleluia. He is Risen. He is Risen, indeed.