



# ***The Westminster Pulpit***

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## ***“The Best Easter Ever!”*** **Sermon on John 20:1-18**

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Resurrection of the Lord  
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### ***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. <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes. <sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not touch 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.’” <sup>18</sup> 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.

Best Easter ever! Do you have one? I asked a few people that question this week. A number of them remembered as a child, waking up and finding an Easter basket, chocolate bunny, jellybeans, those nasty peeps, all nestled in green plastic grass.

Best Easter ever?

Someone shared an early childhood memory of “over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house we go.” Cousins and kickball. Someone said coming home from college late at night, and from the road, seeing the kitchen light on and knowing love couldn’t wait to welcome him home. Best Easter ever. Someone said it was the Easter that soon followed being diagnosed cancer free. She said, “It was as joyful a day as I can remember.”

What bubbled up in my mind was when I was a young pastor and saw the Sanctuary filled for the first time. Packed to the gills. The Orchestra filled the front of the church. Beautiful music, beautiful sunny day, lemonade on the lawn, all with a great atmosphere. Followed by a minivan packed and ready to go to the beach for a week. Best Easter ever!

This year, on the Monday after Easter, I get to report for jury duty. Best Easter ever. But I will say that after the last couple of years - 2020 when Easter was a handful of us in the Sanctuary along with a blurry video, and 2021 being outside in the cold in a parking lot - this could in the running for the best Easter ever. But it might need a little more sun, a few more pipes back in the organ, lower inflation, and the end of the war in the Ukraine.

What are the ingredients that make for the best Easter ever?

Can you imagine if the early church asked Mary Magdalene that question? Sending a reporter to her home. Finding her somewhere between scattering a few more plastic eggs in the backyard for the kids and pulling out a sheet of aluminum foil to put over the lamb in the oven. The pimento cheese just needs a half a teaspoon more mayonnaise to it.

“Mary, sit down here at the kitchen table and tell us, when was your best Easter ever?” She looks at the calendar on the side of the refrigerator and says, “I can’t believe it’s been 18 years ago today. Seems like only yesterday. But it was that first one that was the best one, and all the others since, well, they’ve been nice, but not like that first Easter. It was just so surprising as you might imagine. Never been an Easter like that.”

Do you think she would she say something like that? Thinking of Easter as some historical marker on the timeline of the world? I think she would say the best Easter ever just keeps on coming. I think she would say, “Look, there was a day when I thought “they” won again.

“They” had the power over my life.

“They” were the ones who came after him at night with torches and weapons.

“They” were the ones who brought him to Pilate.

“They” were the ones who shouted ‘Free Barabbas! And Kill Jesus.’

“They” were the ones who put him on a cross.

“They” were the ones who divided his clothes.

“They” were the ones who pierced his side with a spear.

My life was ruled by “they”. They.... And that morning when I looked into that empty tomb, I knew “they” had won again. “I ran and I told Peter, ‘They have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have laid him.’” They! “I told it to men in white, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him.’” “I told it to the Gardner, ‘They have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have laid him.’”

And then, he said my name.

There is nothing like hearing your name called out by someone who was dead. Have you ever heard your name?

I remember visiting my mom last year. I got word that she was barely there. Could be any time. I remember summoning the courage to go into the nursing home and see her in her room. For the first time, she wouldn’t know who I was. I just had to prepare myself for that. I walked into the nursing home, made my way to her death bed, and there she was in the cafeteria, asleep in her wheelchair. “Mom?” “Oh, Donny baby! My Donny baby! It’s so good to see you.” Well, she’s not dead yet. Best Easter ever.

“Why are you crying?” “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have laid him.” “Mary!” “My teacher!”

My teacher! As if she’s saying, “Oh what I’ve learned.” That “they” who are against me, “they” who hold me back, “they” who set out to ruin my dreams, “they” who have the power over me – “they” are no match for the power of God.

Best Easter ever!

I asked people in the office, “Best Easter ever?” Guy said, “I don’t know if I have one, but I have this. My Pop and I on Easter morning would have an exchange of words. He would say or I would say, “the Lord is risen.” He would respond or I would respond. “He is risen indeed.” We would go to church together. Guy said, “I remember being away at school and I called Pop up on the phone on Easter morning. And when he picked up the phone... “He is risen.” And the response, “He is risen indeed.” And I read on Guy’s face that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Not even “They” of death, so made manifest in the eternal relationship between Pop and son. Best Easter ever!

Best Easter ever? It had to be a couple of months ago now. I received a note that read, “I would like you to know what a difference you made in my life. The kindness and the work you did in my home has improved the quality of my life. Everything you did was so representative of the Lord. I have never known such kindness. You have blessed me beyond measure.” -Cathy Burton.

I have never met Cathy Burton. But some people, who are part of this thing called the Body of Christ, some Body of Christ had ears to hear that she was crying. Some Body of Christ that sacrificed a bit of what you have for what she didn't have. Some Body of Christ who had eyes to see and stop and show her kindness. She is in her home today. Best Easter ever.

It had to be only a few weeks ago. He said to me, “I'm tired of being broken and I need to get some help.” And his confession was an answer to prayer and the help was an answer to prayer. Because of your generous giving we could get him the help he needed. It all adds up, you see, to you being the body of Christ. A savior for someone who was once dead and is now alive again. Best Easter ever.

It had been only a day ago, when you sent a note of love and encouragement. A few days ago, when you gave a little grace. A few tears ago, that you let go and let God in. A few days ago, when you held out your hand. A few days ago, when you grabbed a hand. A few moments ago, in this world where they are bombing the innocent and the numbers seem to be on the way up, and inflation is at the highest level since 1985. A few moments ago, when you heard the Lord say your name.

Hear the Lord say your name.

Hear the Lord call you into the life of joy in the face of adversity.

See! We live in a garden graced in power and love, and “This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad it,” and “Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus,” and our cups truly runneth over. We are the receivers and the givers of the Best Easter ever.

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