

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, April 5, 2026

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If you are joining us for the first time in a long time, then we want you to know that as we make the transition from the life and ministries of the church to hearing God's word read and proclaimed, we do so by taking a couple deep breaths together. Okay? So, this morning can be a busy one, high energy and whatnot. So, we take a moment to center down into what God is calling us to in this time. So, get comfy in your pews, perhaps close your eyes if that is your posture, and take a deep breath in with me. Breathe it out slowly. Another deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. And breathe in God's mercies.

Breathe out God's mercies to others. And breathe in God's mercies. And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments. That you would quiet any voice within us by your own. That we might hear your word for us this day. And that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

If you were with us on Maundy Thursday, whether in person or online, you heard Pastor Mary share with us that the Gospel of John is not attended to in the lectionary save during the season of Eastertide. And so we'll begin this morning a study of the Gospel of John that's going to carry us through much of Eastertide. We'll have dashes of other scripture in there, but we have the recollection of the Gospel of John this morning, which centers us on the resurrection story. We're in the 20th chapter of the Gospel. We'll begin in the first verse.

*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 disciples 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. Peter saw the linen wrappings lying there and the cloth that had been on Jesus's 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, 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*

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*the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" And 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 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 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 to your father, to my God and to 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.*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

I love the Easter story for all the reasons why you might imagine a pastor and a Christian loves the Easter story. But I love it more when I get to read the different interpretations of it, the different details of the way in which the gospel writers speak of it. I love the Easter story because every time I read it, the spirit draws something new to my attention. This week, I was drawn to a phrase in the very first verse of the passage that we have read this morning. "Early on the first day of the week while it was still dark." Five words that for me reshaped the entire story. "While it was still dark." Mary makes her way to the tomb before the light of day. She must have been exhausted from all that had transpired over the previous days, over the previous three years. She had to have been exhausted. And yet, she rises early "while it was still dark." With this phrase, John does not simply tell us when Mary went to the tomb. He tells us what it felt like. It was still dark. The exhaustion, Mary's, would have been physical. It would have been emotional. It would have been spiritual. And the gospel writer doesn't want us to know the color of the sky that morning. He wants us to know her world while it was still dark. For Mary and for the disciples, grief and worry, denial and a sense of abandonment. That was the darkness that they were navigating in those days. We'll find them not long from now huddled behind a closed door, fearful for what will happen to them for having claimed at least at one time to be disciples of Jesus.

What I love about the Easter story is that if we are honest, we know those feelings too. Not in the same way that Mary knew those feelings that morning, but something akin to it. We know that there are parts of our world and parts of our lives where it is still dark.

The beginning of the good news this morning is that it is precisely there in the dark that the Easter story takes place. Mary reaches the tomb while it is still dark. She finds that the stone has

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been rolled away. And not just that, but that it is empty at first glance. And given what she has endured, she can be forgiven for fearing the worst. In verse two, after she has made her way back to the other disciple, she says, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb. And we do not know where they have laid him."

She assumes the worst, thievery of this one that they have called their rabbi. She sees the stone rolled away and assumes the worst. She, in fact, is looking at resurrection but calling it loss. God has already acted but she doesn't know it yet. And I want you to hear this morning that there are moments when God has already begun to redeem what in your life feels irredeemable.

And yet we still read the situation as grief and loss. Resurrection is already happening even while it is still dark. Because it's still dark though, it's hard for her to see clearly. And so after the other disciples, Peter, Simon, Peter and the beloved, after they've seen the scene that she had already painted for them, seen it with their own eyes, and they make their way back quietly to be with the other disciples, she lingers. This is a holy lingering that Mary does, weeping as she was there. First she sees angels, and then she turns and sees another. Verse 15 says, "Supposing him, this figure in the darkness 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." She turns and she is looking straight at Jesus, but she doesn't recognize him. She doesn't recognize him, not because nothing has changed, but because everything in this moment has changed. This is not Jesus back the way that he was, the one that she's walked with and learned from for three years. This is Jesus alive in a way the world has never seen before. When God makes all things new, even the familiar can look unfamiliar. Sometimes the reason we cannot recognize what God is doing is because God is doing something we have simply never seen before.

And we are not wrong about what we see. We just aren't seeing it deeply enough.

And then in the midst of that darkness, of that figure that she imagines to be the gardener, everything turns when Jesus speaks. He says, through the darkness, "Mary," and immediately she turns to him and says in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means teacher.

Jesus says her name. He doesn't argue with her. Doesn't try to dissuade her that he is the gardener. Doesn't explain what is happening. He simply says her name, Mary. And in that moment the darkness does not vanish but she can see. Resurrection becomes visible when it becomes to us personal. The darkness is not vanquished away in a moment but we are reoriented in the midst of that darkness. The risen Christ is not always recognized in that place, but he is always the one who calls us by name.

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The fullness of the good news that we greet on this Easter morning is deeply truthful. And so I want to dwell on that for a moment. There are some of you who have come to this place this morning navigating your own darkness. You have carried it with you. It is emotional. It is, it's physical. It's spiritual in nature. Might be darkness that is deeply personal. Or it might be darkness that you hold personally because of the way it impacts a relationship, a marriage, your work, your faith. If that is you this morning, then I want you to hear and know that the good news of resurrection is happening even in the midst of that darkness, that there is one speaking through that darkness, dim as it might be, and saying your name, calling you because he knows you. If it still feels dark, that does not mean that God is absent. If you cannot yet recognize what God is doing, that does not mean God is doing nothing.

The good news of the Easter story is that it means that the resurrection is already underway. If you find yourself in the midst of deep darkness, you find yourself in the exact same place Mary was that morning.

There are others of you who have come to this place this morning, light as a feather, navigating one of the most fruitful seasons of your life. Some of you woke early this morning because it was a joy to do so.

If that is you, then I want to posit to you this morning that what Mary does next is your calling. She doesn't hold on to him as he instructs her not to. But she does go from that place and to his disciples and says to them, "I have seen the Lord." If you have come into this place full of light and goodness in this season, I want to posit to you that the Lord may soon or already has drawn close to you one who needs to hear their name spoken in the midst of the dim light of morn, that needs to be told that the darkness that they are navigating on this Easter morning is not the final word. That while you're not there to explain away that darkness, you do know a story of one who goes to a tomb while it's still dark, who can't see clearly. And yet. However you have come to this place this day, be it filled with darkness or light, know that God is here speaking your name in the light of this morning, equipping you also in every way to walk alongside others, navigating their own darkness.

The good news of the Easter story is that Easter does not begin with everything being explained. It begins in the dark with a stone already rolled away, with a savior already risen, with a voice that speaks our names and a world already being made new even before we can see it clearly. So as we navigate not only our personal darkness but the darkness that we see around us in the world, may we in the dim light of this Easter morning be reminded that the power which raised

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Jesus from that tomb, that rolled away that stone, that neatly wrapped those linens and placed them in the corner of that large tomb, that same power is at work in you and in our world. Thanks be to God for the gift for the good news of Easter.

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, you know our darkness even better than we know it ourselves. You know also the light that you bring upon it. For each of us as we navigate what is difficult, what is grievous to us, what feels like abandonment, we pray that you might speak our name through the dim light of morning. that even as we can't see you, we can trust your very presence there.

Not only to each of us do we ask you to speak this day, but indeed to your world so acquainted with darkness. May we leave this place where we have glimpsed you and heard our names. May we leave this place with the unabashed hope that we have met here. May we speak into every dark and shadowy place in your world a word of your resurrecting hope. May we trust and may we believe that the same power which raised Jesus from the dead is indeed at work even now. For we ask it in our risen Savior's name. Amen.