

APRIL 5, 2026 EASTER: LOVE THAT RISES! Pastor Gina

John 20:1–10 NRSVUE

20 Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance. She ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, gasping for breath. “They took the Master from the tomb. We don’t know where they’ve put him.”

Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter. Stooping to look in, he saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn’t go in. Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself. Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. No one yet knew from the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. The disciples then went back home.

Let us continue with the Gospel reading from—

John 20:11–18 NRSVUE The 2 disciples decided to go back home...

But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she knelt to look into the tomb and saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus’ body had been laid. They said to her, “Woman, why do you weep?”

“They took my Master,” she said, “and I don’t know where they put him.” After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn’t recognize him.

Jesus spoke to her, “Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?” She, thinking that he was the gardener, said, “Sir, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him.”

Jesus said, “Mary.”

Turning to face him, she said in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” meaning “Teacher!” Jesus said, “Don’t cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene went, telling the news to the disciples: “I saw the Master!” And she told them everything he said to her.

*This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Early that morning...

~Before the sun rose.

~Before the birds began to sing.

~Before hope had even stretched its wings...

A woman walked through the darkness.

Mary Magdalene. She walked carrying grief.

Carrying heartbreak. Carrying the terrible finality of Friday.

Because as far as Mary knew...Love had died.

She had watched it happen.

The nails. The cross. The stone rolled shut.

And when love is buried, something inside us whispers:

“This is the end.”

But Easter begins with a quiet, earth-shaking truth:

What looks buried is not always dead.

Sometimes...

It is just waiting to rise.

John’s Gospel tells us something important this Easter Morning.

Mary came to the tomb **while it was still dark.**

Not after the sunrise.

Not when things made sense.

She came in the dark.

And if truth be told...

that's where most of us live sometimes.

In the dark places of life.

The place where...

~We carry more than we let on.

~As we navigate the pressures of school, of our social circles,
and of our workplaces.

~Where we try to hold everything together while feeling like
we're falling apart inside.

Maybe we're living in the place where...

~We scroll through everyone else's life
and quietly wonder why ours feels harder.

~Or we're exhausted—but we don't know how to slow down.

~And we're surrounded by people—but still feel alone.

There's other dark places of life where...

~The diagnosis came.

~The relationship changed.

~The future feels uncertain.

The place where...

~The wars continue.

~The headlines don't stop.

~And the world feels fragile.

And somewhere deep down we wonder:

Is anything really going to change?

Is hope still possible?

And sometimes...it feels like love itself

has been buried...so deep, deep down.

And it's exactly there...in all those places...that Easter begins.

I take such great comfort knowing that Mary asked that question too...
Stumbling around in the dark—"Is hope still possible?"
And when she reached the tomb...the stone was rolled away.
But she assumed the worst. "They've taken him."

*Oh friends, when hope has been wounded...
it is hard to imagine resurrection.

Mary stands outside the tomb weeping.
And someone appears beside her.
And she thinks he's the gardener.

Which might be the most beautiful "mistake" anyone makes in the Bible.
Because in a way...she's exactly right.

Just think about it...gardeners know something about seeds.
~Seeds must be buried.
~Seeds disappear into dark soil.
~Seeds break open underground.

And when that happens...It looks like death.
But gardeners know something the rest of us forget.
Breaking open is not the end.
It is the beginning of life.

Jesus once said: "A grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die...
but if it dies, it bears much fruit."
Seeds don't sprout without breaking.
And love...does not rise without sacrifice.

It's exactly what Pastor Rich shared Palm Sunday
as we began our Holy Week journey—
Jesus walks straight into suffering for Love's sake...for our sake.

On Friday...
Love was buried.
But Sunday morning...that FIRST Easter Morning...
Love began to rise.

But back to the key moment...

where everything changes in the Gospel story,
Because Mary still doesn't recognize him.

Until one special moment. One word.

Jesus, the Savior of the World, says: "Mary."

That's it. Her name. And suddenly the darkness breaks.

~Because resurrection is not just an event.

It is a recognition.

The moment when grief gives way to hope.

The moment when we realize:

Love was never gone.

It was just waiting to rise.

And friends...

The risen Christ is still calling names.

~Still calling people out of despair.

~Still calling people out of their dark places.

~Still calling people into hope.

~Still calling the church to be a living sign that love is stronger than death.

Because let's be honest.

Our world needs resurrection right now...

We need the Love that Rises!

Because we are living in a time that feels unsettled in so many ways.

~We feel the strain of deep division—

in our country, in our communities, even in our relationships.

~We watch national and global leaders argue and systems strain,
and sometimes it feels like truth itself is hard to hold onto.

~We see fear rising...anger spreading...

violence escalating...loneliness and isolation growing...

And it leaves many of us asking:

- ~What is happening to us?
- ~Where is this all going?
- ~Can anything bring us back together?

We feel it.

- In the tension.
- In the conversations we avoid.
- In the quiet exhaustion of trying to make sense of it all.

And in moments like this...we wonder:

Can Love still rise in a world like this?

But Easter speaks right into that question.

Easter does not ignore the chaos.

It does not deny the darkness.

Easter says: YES!

Yes—love rises.

- Love rises in hospital rooms.
- Love rises in acts of justice and mercy.
- Love rises in forgiveness when it would be easier to hold on to hurt.
- Love rises in communities that choose compassion over fear...

Who show that YOU BELONG no matter what!

- And love rises in ordinary people—
people like you and me—
who refuse to let darkness have the final word.

Because resurrection didn't just happen **once**.

Resurrection is something God is **still doing**.

Seeds are still breaking open.

Life is still emerging.

Hope is still rising.

Love is always rising!

So let me ask you something this morning.

~Where in your life does love need to rise?

~Where has something been buried?

~Where has hope felt sealed behind a cold, hard stone?

Because Easter is not just about what happened to Jesus.

~Easter is about what God can do with every buried thing.

~Every broken heart.

~Every lost dream.

~Every seed waiting underground to burst free.

Friends...

The stone was rolled away.

The gardener is still working.

The seeds are breaking open.

And love...

love rises.

It rises in mercy.

It rises in courage.

It rises in hope.

And it rises in you. Each and every one of you!

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Amen and Amen!