

## **“Who are You Looking For?”** (John 20:1–18)(4.17.22) EASTER MESSAGE

John 20:1–18 (NIV84) *The Empty Tomb*

**20** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.<sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.<sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.<sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.<sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,<sup>7</sup> as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.<sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.<sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

*Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene*

<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to their homes,<sup>11</sup> but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she

wept, she bent over to look into the tomb<sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

<sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."<sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

## **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"Who are You Looking For?"**

INTRODUCTION:

I confess that lately I have wondered if my time at Emmaus Church is up. Should I move on because there seems to be little fruit and much frustration. Would Emmaus Church be better served by someone else? Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe this thought is only the sorrow filled Saturday before Resurrection Day. Maybe, I need to go to the Empty Tomb and find the Resurrected Jesus.

In the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, there was a falling away of many of Jesus' disciples. They found the teachings of Jesus to be very challenging. John 6:60 (NIV84) On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Imagine how discouraging this must have been for Jesus.

John 6:67–69 (NIV84)

<sup>67</sup> “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, “**Lord, to whom shall we go?** You have the words of eternal life.”<sup>69</sup> We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” It was the body of Jesus, that Mary Magdalene sought. Who is it you are looking for?

Every year, we celebrate Easter, Resurrection Sunday. We read the same scriptures over and over again. Are they so familiar that we take them for granted? Have they become dull and dead to us? We sing, “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” We sing, “Christ is Alive.” We may know this to be an objective fact in our minds, but is it a reality in our hearts? Is Jesus alive **in you AND to you?** Maybe we need to go to the garden tomb of Jesus ourselves. Maybe we need to answer Jesus’ question to Mary, “Who is it you are looking for?”

Maybe Jesus needs to be resurrected within us.

BODY:

Is that idea foreign to your way of thinking? While the idea of Jesus being manifested within us seems strange, it has a lot of biblical support. There are at least two reasons why it is hard to grasp. First, it is a supernatural occurrence. Second, too few

Christians evidence the truth of Jesus living through us.

Warren Wiersbe queries: Historical faith says, "Christ lives!" **Saving faith** says, "**Christ lives in me!**" Do you have saving faith?

Now, I am going to give you several scriptures to support Jesus living in and through us:

2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV84) Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?

Romans 8:10 (NIV84) But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Galatians 1:15–16 (NIV84)

<sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased<sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man,

Galatians 2:20 (NIV84) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Colossians 1:27 (NIV84) To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Once we get past the challenge of comprehending such a magnificent promise, we must appropriate it too. That means we need to take hold of the promise – or even better, **we need to allow the promise to take hold of us**. As we live into our faith, our faith blossoms and frames every aspect of our lives.

Paul gives us another verse to express this concept, this reality, in Galatians 4:19 (NIV84) “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you,**” [pause] BUT, that verse ends in a comma. Galatians 4:20 (NIV84) how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Maybe Jesus needed to be resurrected in the Galatian Christians.

All that I have said about individual believers can be applied to the church, the Body of Christ. It may be easier for us to understand in this context because the church is supposed to be Christ’s representative and reality here on earth. The very language used facilitates our understanding.

Romans 12:4–5 (NIV84)<sup>4</sup> Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,<sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Colossians 1:18 (NIV84) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Since the COVID pandemic came upon the world, great harm came upon the Body of Christ, the Church. Each family and every person had to make challenging choices about safety and gathering in the assembly of the Church. The pandemic is not over and there may be more to follow. What was sold as a temporary situation has become the new normal.

When people stay away from the church, they are missing out. They are not experiencing a community of Christians. Additionally, they are withholding their own special spiritual gifting of God the Holy Spirit from the other members of the Body. We say we worship in spirit and in truth. Our spiritual life is most critical.

When I go to gatherings with other clergy, our experience here at Emmaus is not unique. The other churches have similar situations.

When I went for my annual Local Pastor License Review before the District Committee on Ministry, they asked me how we were doing. I explained how we were down to half the attendance numbers from before the pandemic and our children's ministry was hit especially hard. Everyone's head at that review was nodding in agreement. What I described was pretty much the norm.

There is no doubt that we need Jesus to be resurrected in the life of Emmaus Church – this particular Body of Christ.

I have spoken of the need to experience Jesus' resurrection in our personal lives. I have spoken of the need to experience Jesus' resurrection in the life of the Church. Now, I want to address the need to experience Jesus' resurrection in the life of each generation.

It seems our children's ministry was hit especially hard by COVID. I believe that is because we were still struggling from the loss of Connie's longstanding efforts in this ministry when she and BW moved away. We had yet to make a healthy transition when COVID came.

Next week, we will be relaunching our children's ministry under the leadership of Samantha Gormley. In my discussions with her, I am encouraged by her attitude and belief that she has



been called to this ministry. Her ideas of encouraging community among families is essential. Her intention to inform and nurture the children in alignment with the sermon so they can discuss it with their parents is exactly right. To raise children in the faith, church and parents must be a team.

This past Thursday, I saw a great example of bringing Jesus alive in the next generation. The Pilgrim Academy had their annual Grandparents Day celebration. Normally, it is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, but after a two year hiatus, it was held on Holy Thursday. Mr. Storr, the Headmaster, reported that registration for next year is very strong on top of this year's substantial expansion.

The Grandparents' Day Program had the children share how and why they appreciated their grandparents. Then each grade, starting with kindergarten and ending with sixth grade, presented different music. At the end, all of the children of the Lower School went up front and sang praises to God together. As you watch it now, can you see the resurrected Christ in this generation?

[Facebook](#) Grandparents' Day 4/14/22. Wasn't that just awesome! It was very powerful for me.

This week, as I worked on this message, I wondered if my concept of us experiencing Jesus' resurrection in our lives may be a little bit out there on the fringes. Then yesterday, I received an email that our bishop sent out to the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. Hear now an excerpt from Bishop John Schol's email:

"I do not know about you, but I could use a resurrection. Resurrection is the gift of raising us up beyond our circumstances, beyond pain, beyond suffering, beyond sin, beyond everything that seeks to consume health, joy, justice and life itself. I can use mini resurrection each and every day. That is why the women faithfully followed [Jesus]. In Jesus Christ they experienced a resurrection every day. I too experience mini resurrections every day through you, your congregation, your leadership and your ministry. You are the body of Christ, embodying the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thank you.

In this Easter season, let us all continue to be faithful and live so that others witness and experience the resurrected Christ in and through us."

CONCLUSION:

*Here is my Last Wednesday's Devotional April 13.*

**IN THE GARDEN** by C. Austin Miles, 1868–1945. I had already chosen this as our closing hymn for today, so I found it to be a blessing.

*Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that He had said these things to her. (John 20:18)*

It was in 1912 that music publisher Dr. Adam Geibel asked author and composer C. Austin Miles to write a hymn text that would be "sympathetic in tone, breathing tenderness in every line; one that would bring hope to the hopeless, rest for the weary, and downy pillows to dying beds." Mr. Miles has left the following account of the writing of this hymn:

One day in April, 1912, I was seated in the dark room, where I kept my photographic equipment and organ. I drew my Bible toward me; it opened at my favorite chapter, John 20—whether by chance or inspiration let each reader decide. That meeting of Jesus and Mary had lost none of its power and charm.

As I read it that day, I seemed to be part of the scene. I became a silent witness to that dramatic moment in Mary's life, when she knelt before her Lord, and cried, "Rabboni!"

My hands were resting on the Bible while I stared at the light blue wall. As the light faded, I seemed to be standing at the entrance of a garden, looking down a gently winding path, shaded by olive branches. A woman in white, with head bowed, hand clasping her throat, as if to choke back her sobs, walked slowly into the shadows. It was Mary. As she came to the tomb, upon which she placed her hand, she bent over to look in, and hurried away.

John, in flowing robe, appeared, looking at the tomb; then came Peter, who entered the tomb, followed slowly by John.

As they departed, Mary reappeared; leaning her head upon her arm at the tomb, she wept. Turning herself, she saw Jesus standing, so did I. I knew it was He. She knelt before Him, with arms outstretched and looking into His face cried, "Rabboni!" I awakened in sun light, gripping the Bible, with muscles tense and nerves vibrating. Under the inspiration of this vision I wrote as quickly as the words could be formed the poem exactly as it has since appeared. That same evening I wrote the music.

I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet  
the birds hush their singing; and the melody that  
He gave to me within my heart is ringing.

I'd stay in the garden with Him tho the night  
around me be falling; but He bids me go—thru the  
voice of woe, His voice to me is calling.

**Refrain:** And He walks with me, and He talks with  
me, and He tells me I am His own, and the joy we  
share as we tarry there, none other has ever  
known.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, with Paul in  
Philippians 3:10–11 (NIV84)

<sup>10</sup> **I want to know Christ and the power of his  
resurrection** and the fellowship of sharing in his  
sufferings, becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> and  
so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the  
dead.

Too few Christians experience the power of Christ's  
resurrection in their lives. They walk along the  
water at the beach allowing the water to gently  
splash against their ankles and maybe up to their  
calves. They never wade out into the deep and get  
baptized by the waves of power found in the  
Resurrection of Christ our Lord.

Let us thirst to experience the resurrection of Jesus in our personal lives, the life of this Body of Christ, and the life of the coming generations.

Who are you looking for?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.