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**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Easter Day**  
**April 5, 2026**  
**Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18**

**"Grace on the Edge of Darkness"**

Marvin: "Marty, have you seen my cuff links?"

Marty: "Don't you remember, Dad, I used them to fasten together my science project at school?"

Marvin: "Millie, Albert Einstein, here, discovered the 'missing link' in my dresser drawer. What am I supposed to do for cufflinks on my Easter shirt?"

Millie: "Oh, Marvin, you can use a pair of my earrings. How does my Easter dress look? It seems to have shrunk since I bought it."

Marvin: "Millie, I don't want to have gold 'dealy bobs' hanging off my cuff. I want cuff links!"

Millie: "Marvin, would you be happier with paper clips?"

Marvin: "Oh, all right! I'll use your earrings as cufflinks, but you'd better not tell anybody about this....."

Millie: "What's that racket upstairs?"

Marvin: "Mary, Marty, stop fighting and get ready for church. We're running late already and you know how hard it is to get a good seat on Easter."

And so it goes in millions of homes where there is excitement and anticipation (not to mention a sugar high) on Easter Day. However, amidst the preparation of our Easter finery and sumptuous meals, we may have lost touch with the way this day really began.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with wearing our finest clothes and best smiles on Easter because it is a grand and glorious day that we should celebrate in grand style. But, in the midst of our fanciful tales and Easter egg hunts, we can't afford to lose sight of the reality of how this day began.

1,993 years ago, Easter Day began in darkness. For Mary Magdalene, it began before dawn. She went to the tomb, only to find it empty. Her already dark mood probably darkened even more because she assumed that someone had stolen Jesus' body. Without

stopping to consider what she had seen (or rather, what she had not seen) she ran straight to Peter and John to report the presumed theft.

Peter and John lost no time in running to the tomb to confirm what Mary had told them. Their dark night seemed unending. "What next?" they must have thought to themselves. The disciples had believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but they saw their dreams nailed to a cross, where they apparently withered and died. Then he was put in a borrowed grave - his side still split from the deep gash of a spear, his hands and feet disfigured from the nails, his forehead a tangled mess of hair and blood where the crown of thorns had pierced his scalp, and his back a horrifying gridwork of lacerations. He had died a form of death reserved for the dregs of society.

As far as the disciples were concerned, he was as dead as their dreams. They cowered in the dark behind closed doors. The two nights following Jesus' crucifixion were the longest nights of their lives.

Many of us have known long nights, too. The words of a doctor, "I'm sorry, it's malignant. There is nothing we can do." A phone call in the middle of the night, "Mr. Jones, this is the emergency room at the hospital. There has been an accident. Can you come?" The words of a supervisor, "I'm sorry, but your work is just not up to our expectations. I think you'd be better suited for a different job."

Many of us have lived through our own dark night when we have stood on the edge of darkness and peered into the abyss of despair. That is precisely why we need to understand that Easter was not born in the brightness of day, but in the terrifying darkness of the night. Mary groped her way through the dark to the tomb, absorbed in fear and terror.

But by the time the sun had rolled to the top of the horizon she was standing among the disciples proclaiming, "I have seen the Lord." What was it that convinced Mary that Jesus had risen from death? Was it the empty tomb? Did that convince her of the resurrection? Not really.

The first thing Mary did when she saw that the stone covering the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away was to turn tail and run. She scampered back to Peter and John and told them that Jesus' body had been stolen. Even after returning to the tomb and stooping to peer into it, Mary still thought that there was some rational explanation for the emptiness of the tomb. The empty tomb may have raised her curiosity but it didn't increase her faith.

If it wasn't the empty tomb, then perhaps it was the two angels in the tomb who enticed Mary to believe in the resurrection. Actually, it appears that Mary didn't recognize the angels for who they were. She talked with them like they were next door neighbors, registering no surprise or recognition that she was in the presence of the divine.

We shouldn't be shocked by her incredulity because we quite regularly neglect our moments of contact with the divine, calling miraculous events coincidences and providence good luck. Even when Mary found herself face-to-face with the risen Christ; seeing was not believing. She mistook Jesus for the gardener.

As with most of us, Mary saw only what she expected. She had come with Peter and John, but curiously, she stayed after they went home, transfixed in her grief, weeping at this final outrage: "Where have they taken the body of Jesus? Where can I find the body?" The body was important to her just like it is to us.

Whether we like to admit it or not, the body, the physical self, is a big part of our love. We don't love some disembodied human being. We love those eyes, that hand, that touch. Mary wanted that. The sight of the stone rolled away, the folded linen cloths, the absence of the body, did not move Mary to thoughts of resurrection. She, like Peter, knew of only one conceptual possibility: "They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him."

Her logic is faultless. Dead bodies do not simply disappear. Someone has to move them. The world is a place of cause-and-effect rationality. From outside the tomb a voice questions Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Startled, she turned around and struggled to make sense of what she was seeing.

At first she assumed Jesus to be the gardener. Grasping him, she pleaded, "Tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." She wanted Jesus' body so that she might do the proper, conventional, respectful thing for his corpse. Then she heard her name called from outside the tomb, "Mary."

The illogical, unthinkable, impossible, unnatural, incredible broke in to her life. The one certified as dead greeted her, calling her by name. "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father," said Jesus. The voice of Jesus called to her, across the abyss of death, throwing a life line to her across the cavernous expanse between her limited logic and the power of God to work wonders.

Mary was then able to tell the others, "I have seen the Lord." She had moved beyond her preoccupation with the body to an encounter with the living Christ. Her "cause and effect" logic was replaced by the illogic of faith.

There is a silly story about two East Coast men who had never been out of the city. They decided that they had just had it with city living. So they bought a ranch in Colorado. They decided they were going to live on the land and off the grid. They decided that the first thing they needed to run the ranch was a mule.

So they went to a neighboring rancher and asked if he had mule to sell. The rancher answered, "No, I'm afraid not." They were disappointed but they decided to stay and visit a while with the rancher just to be neighborly.

One of the men saw some watermelons stacked against the barn and asked the rancher, "What are those things?" The rancher, decided to have some fun with them at their expense. "Oh," he answered, "those are mule eggs." The greenhorns stopped talking and looked at each other in wide-eyed amazement. "Mule eggs?" they asked. "Yes," said the rancher, barely able to suppress a smile, "mule eggs." In fact," he continued, "you take one of those eggs home and wait for it to hatch and you'll have your mule.

They were overjoyed at this news and offered to buy one of the mule eggs. They agreed on a price, put one of the watermelons in the back of their pickup, and headed down the bumpy country road toward their own ranch. Suddenly, they hit an especially treacherous bump and the watermelon bounced out of the pickup, hit the road, and burst open.

Seeing what had happened in his rearview mirror, the driver turned his truck around and drove back to retrieve the mule egg. Meanwhile this big old jackrabbit was hopping by and when he saw this watermelon burst open in the road, he hopped right into the middle of it and began to eat his fill.

As the two easterners arrived on the scene, they spied their mule egg burst open with this long-eared creature smack-dab in the middle of it. One of the men turned to the other and shouted, "Our mule egg hatched!" as they both began to run toward the mule egg.

The jackrabbit took one look at those two city slickers running toward him and took off, with the men in hot pursuit. The jackrabbit ran in circles for a few minutes with the men giving it everything they had to catch it.

Finally, they could go no further. Both men fell wearily to the ground gasping for air, while the jackrabbit hopped off into the sunset. Raising up on his elbow, one of the men said to the other, "Well, I guess we lost our mule." To which the other man nodded grimly, as he said, "But you know, I'm not sure I wanted to plow that fast anyhow."

Some people greet the news of the resurrection with much the same skepticism - "I'm not sure I want to plow that fast anyhow. Just give me a little faith, just enough to get by on. I don't want to become one of those radical Christians." Resurrection is all well and good as long as it's confined to church. But resurrection is not confined just to church.

Resurrection possibilities exist everywhere we stand on the edge of darkness. The only difference between standing on the edge of darkness and the edge of light is the direction we face. It's all in the way we look at things. Easter draws us toward the light.

I remember a time when I encountered a believer who asked, "Do you have Jesus?" My response was, "No, Jesus has me."

You and I have come here today as Mary Magdalenes, searching for Jesus. Many of us have come from a tomb where we have stood on the edge of darkness. The good news of this days is that is where grace begins – on the edge of darkness. Grace awaits us on the edge of darkness if only we will turn toward the light, where the resurrected Christ awaits us

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Christ, the Lord, is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**