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Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church  
Easter

1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
John 20:1-18

## MOVEMENTS

There is a lot going on. We are in the midst of the Final Four College basketball tournament – the men’s and the women’s, including Maryland’s women’s team. Today is opening day in major league baseball, although the Nationals and Orioles don’t have their first games until tomorrow. We are in the middle of the Cherry Blossom Festival and perhaps the blossoms will actually arrive before the festival is over. Spring Break for some lies in the week ahead and the Masters golf tournament is next weekend. The big introduction of the Apple Watch is in nineteen days. The Run for the Roses Kentucky Derby is less than a month from now. Then there will be Mother’s Day and graduation celebrations. The fireworks of July fourth will be showing their colors after that. Perhaps there will be a vacation trip, a particular wedding, a special concert, a birthday or anniversary celebration that you are looking forward to. The leaves will be turning about the time the World Series comes along. Then the children and young at heart will be wearing their costumes for Halloween. In some years, Election Day comes soon thereafter. Then there are Thanksgiving Dinner, Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve, College Football Bowl Games and the Super Bowl. Then comes Valentine’s Day and the Academy Awards, St. Patrick’s Day and a full year has flown by. I’m sure you will tell me events through the year that are important to you that I left off of the list. And I did leave off one event that might be worth mentioning – Easter.

I have heard our society described as an Event Society, which moves from one event to the next. Of course, media and advertising agencies play up certain events, especially those that attract ratings or drive up profits. And there are events on the church calendar that shape our focus at various times. But I invite you to look at your Easter observance not so much as an event, but as a potential encounter. The movements of Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning can inform our own as we move toward an encounter with our risen Lord.

There is a lot going on here as well. Mary starts in a place of shock, grief and distress. She had been one of those who had been standing near the cross on that Friday afternoon, watching the unthinkable take place before her eyes. Not only was the one she had so admired being executed right in front of her, her greatest hopes were dying as well. The week had begun with such anticipation, with Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem being lauded by the crowds who were coming to observe the Passover in the holy city. But things had taken such a dreadful turn, with a betrayal from one of his own, and most of his followers having gone into hiding as the one, who had been their rabbi and Lord was dying a shameful and painful death.

I have to imagine all of his followers who were there that Friday afternoon were weeping, but we are told that specifically that Mary was weeping on Sunday morning. Even before it was light, she had come to the garden tomb, where she had seen his body laid. She was surprised to find that the stone which had sealed the entrance to the tomb had been

removed. When she looked into the tomb, she saw that Jesus' body was not there. She assumed that a mighty insult had been added to mortal injury, that Jesus' body had been taken. She ran to tell others. Peter and another disciple hurry to the tomb and find it as Mary had indicated. They see the linen cloths with which his body had been wrapped lying there. Was this indication of something wonderful or something dreadful? It was hard to know, and they go back to where they were staying, perhaps in order to tell the others what they had seen.

When Mary gets back to the tomb, she is weeping. She leans over to look in once again. This time she sees two figures inside who ask her why she is weeping. She could have responded, "Why aren't you?" Don't you see the world in which we live, one where good people get executed, where reasons for faith and hope get swiped. Instead, Mary shares once again her assumption that her Lord's body had been taken. But then she senses someone behind her. As she begins to turn toward him, he asks the same question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" And then adds, "Whom are you looking for?" It is a question that looks for her to express her deepest longings. It is an invitation to an encounter. But Mary, still blinded by her grief and her tears, makes a second inaccurate assumption, that she is speaking to the gardener. She asks if he was the one who had moved the body, because she wanted to retrieve the corpse. She thinks Jesus' dead body was all that remained of his presence to her and to the world. But then Jesus calls her by name, "Mary."

Suddenly, with that one word, her understanding of her world is utterly transformed. She turns fully to Jesus, and exclaims in her native Aramaic language, "Rabbouni," which meant, 'my teacher.' She doesn't fully understand the surprising encounter, but there is no more reason for her grief. She embraces Jesus, who tells her not to cling to him in ways that might constrain him, in ways that keep her from doing what is needed for her to do. In Mary's story, there have been movements from grief to weeping to hearing her name called to turning to recognizing to exclaiming and embracing, and now it was time for proclaiming. Jesus tells her to go to his other followers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." The God they knew about through Jesus was now the God they could come to know directly through their risen Lord. The good news is entrusted to Mary, and she delivers it with joyful confidence, saying to the others, "I have seen the Lord." Mary had not been there for the resurrection event. She had seen indication it had happened, but she didn't recognize it as such. But the encounter made up for all of that.

You and I weren't around for the original resurrection event. But we can still have an encounter with our resurrected Lord, who can change the event from a resurrection after death to a resurrection within our lives. We can have an encounter with a God whose bold love is stronger than that which sucks the life out of us, a more lasting power than all that kills. Once we have that encounter, some of our old assumptions about the limitations within the world may fall away. Hope can give our lives new purpose, and rather than seeing only what is awful, we might have reason to be awe-filled. The resurrected One may send us in a different direction than we thought we were headed on a Sunday morning. There are plenty of events in our lives. Some of them add joy to our daily living. I hope Easter is one of those events for you. But this day is also a time when we can have an encounter with One who redefines life itself. Some of the events of our lives will bring pain

or loss or disappointment. But an encounter with our resurrected Lord can mean that our spirits don't have to be mired in a tomb. Yes, there will still be occasions for weeping, but there will also be encounters that fill us with purpose, direction, and life itself. There is a lot going on, but there also is a resurrected One who asks us, "Whom are you looking for?", One who calls us by name. Let us recognize all of the life in such an encounter, so we will want to exclaim something joyful, and share the good news. Is there a reason for an 'Alleluia' this day? The Lord has risen. He is risen indeed. And he calls each one of us by name. Alleluia! Amen.