

Encountering Jesus

Not Your Garden Variety Rabbi

April 9, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: *John 20:1-18*

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 disciple 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. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' 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 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 the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" 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 that 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 hold on to 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 your Father, to my God and 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.

Commentary: In verse 11, the focus returns to Mary standing outside of the tomb, weeping and very much alone. It would seem that neither Peter nor the disciple have offered any words of comfort or encouragement to her. But Mary does not find an empty tomb. While the body of Jesus is not there, there are two angels. In response to their almost ridiculous question about her tears, Mary repeats her interpretation of the situation; the theft of her dear friend's body. Finally she repeats the question once again to a man she believes is the gardener. This may not be as ridiculous an understanding as it seems. It could be that John is giving us a clue to help us understand what has happened.

Where are we? In a garden. Without knowing it, Mary has correctly identified Jesus as a gardener, but not just of a physical garden near Jerusalem. Jesus is the Gardener who is bringing a new world, a new life, and a new creation into being, as he had done before ("All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:3-5).

In the first creation story Adam and Eve sinned and were driven out of the garden disconnected, isolated, and in grief. The world had turned very dark. That is precisely Mary's experience as described in John 20:11 – very much alone in the darkness and *weeping outside the tomb*. But the Risen Christ does not leave her in that condition. He calls her by name and that one word changed everything for Mary. As she instinctively embraces him as her miraculously returned Rabbouni (teacher), Jesus tells her not to hold on to him and their past teacher-pupil relationship (he is not your garden-variety Rabbi). Instead, she is to go and declare to "my brothers" that God is doing something new in the world. Through resurrection of Jesus, God has brought forth the possibility of a new relationship, a new community and a new creation that all can participate in. Jesus sends Mary out of the garden rejoicing, to tell "I have seen the Lord." (John 20:18) Her message declares to us the new beginning that God has prepared for all of us.

-Adapted from commentary by Lucy Lind Hogan
(www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-john-201-18)

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. What are your earliest memories of Easter? When did Easter take on greater significance for you?
2. Why do you think the gospel of John emphasizes the darkness of the day and the isolation of Mary Magdalene at the beginning of the Easter Story? Can you think of a time when things felt particularly bleak for you? How did you deal with this experience?
3. At the tomb, Jesus is right there by Mary but she mistakes him for a gardener. Do you think there have been times when Jesus was present in your life, but you were unaware at the time? Discuss.
4. After Jesus calls Mary by name, she clings to Jesus in excitement and likely wanted their past teacher-pupil relationship to continue, but Jesus has something better for Mary. Do you think that Jesus has something better for us if we could just let go of 'the way things have always been?' What might that be?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: "*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.*" (John 20:18).