

"You Are Looking for Jesus"

Mark 16:1-8, John 20:1-18

[1-title slide] *Welcome, prayer.*

[2-lost] Out of curiosity, how many people here today got lost on the way to church? No one? Good. You never know.

If I had a dime for every time I'd gotten lost, I'd be a rich man. Better yet, if I have a nickel for every time I've lost something, I could retire early! For fun, I'll give you a list of the things I lost just this week. Are any of these familiar? Reading glasses, regular glasses, wristwatch, cellphone, ear muffs, laptop, eclipse glasses, dog boot. Except for those ear muffs, I did eventually find those lost items. (There's still hope they'll turn up.)

There is tangible stuff we lose, and then there are more abstract things. Have you ever lost your patience? Lost your mind? Your appetite? How about, lost track of time? Lost money? Relationships?

Let's go deeper. Have you ever lost hope? Lost your faith? Lost your way?

Sure. We all have, at one time or another. However, let me tell you one thing I've never lost: I have never lost an actual body. I have presided at dozens of funerals, and never once have I had to ask the funeral director, "Have you seen the corpse? It was here a minute ago."

(One time a man asked me, after a funeral, if I had his daughter's body. I think he meant, was I going out to the cemetery now with a shovel? Apparently, he never spoke with the funeral director, and thought I was doing both jobs.)

[3-tomb] If you've never lost an actual body, you're doing better than the women and men who first followed Jesus. Easter is the greatest story lost and found. Literally, Jesus' disciples were searching for his body, and instead, they found him, alive, and it completely changed them.

[4-women walking] Mark chapter 16 is the strangest story of the resurrection ever written. Here are the women on the way to the tomb. They are trying to finish the burial preparations cut short by the Sabbath. Allow me to read the following beautiful insight from Dr. Lisa Hancock of UMC Discipleship Ministries.

“It is hard to comprehend the mindset of those women who made their way to the tomb that morning. They went to serve; they went because it was what people did when there was a death. The rituals of death were certain, known, automatic, unthinking. Which was good, because on that morning, they weren’t capable of thinking, just moving, going through the motions. They were moving like automatons, like robots assigned a specific task—gathering the spices, the oils, the cloth, wrapping it all together, preparing for the early morning journey.

Then they slept. Or they didn’t sleep. They may have stared at the walls, at the dark night, eyes burning with used up tears. They waited, numb in the night. They all rose together, without a word, driven by a common need to serve, to do something that made sense in a senseless time. And they set out, huddled together, but alone in their own pain and silence. They walked on legs they couldn’t feel, burdened by the weight they couldn’t have described if they had to.

Then out of the silence was a sudden intake of breath; “the stone,” someone whispered. They stopped their march, stopped dead in their tracks. Their way was blocked. The tears that were barely held in check began to flow again, etching tracks in their dust-covered faces, splashing to the ground like great drops of blood from an open wound. “The stone.” It blocked their way, their duty, their hope. They couldn’t perform this last service for him; they couldn’t take their last look at him, at the lifeless body that once had been more alive than any person they had ever known, would ever know. The stone. It blocked them, cut them off, stymied them. They almost turned back. But they started to move again—toward the place of death. Uncertain, bowed, and almost broken, but they walked on, wondering. *Who would roll away the stone?” – Lisa Hancock, umcdiscipleship.org*

Do you think these women lost their minds? A massive stone was set in the entrance of the tomb to keep out grave robbers and animals, to keep in the smell. We’re talking a heavy rock rolled into a low spot, which possibly one person could

install, but would be nearly impossible for even several people to remove, certainly not a handful of women with no tools, or truck, or tow line. Maybe they were a little crazy; certainly their grief made it hard to think clearly.

[5-women shocked] So their reaction to what they see next is understandable. You could say they lost their senses, because they see the rock is rolled away and an angel sits in the tomb, clearly not dead, and clearly not Jesus.

The scripture says the women were afraid, so of course, the angel says, “Fear not!” (Again, I submit to you, if you want a scary costume for Halloween, go as an angel.) The women, frozen in terror and disbelief, are shocked into silence. The angel, of course, knows why, and he says the obvious. “You’re looking for Jesus, but he’s not here. He is risen. Look around you. This place is empty. Jesus is already on the way back to Galilee to meet you and the disciples. Go, tell them.” (Wouldn’t it be great if an angel told you where you left your car keys?)

Of course, the women freaked out, and at first, the gospel of Mark says, they told know one. How interesting. The women witnessed the most amazing miracle ever, and they weren’t sure what to do or who to tell.

Later editions of Mark clarify this story in verses 9-11. This next part expounds on the second story of the resurrection we read in John.

[6-Mary] “Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.” (Mark 16:9-11)

[7-John and Peter] The longer version in John 20 says Mary went and told Peter and John, who got into a footrace back to the tomb. Peter lost the race – another thing lost! – but he was still the first to enter the empty tomb. Both disciples looked around, and they “saw and believed,” but “as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” (John 20:8-9)

It just seems like everybody in this story is losing something. And they are all looking for Jesus.

[8-Mary] The final resurrection story is perhaps the most famous, and the most emotional. Mary Magdalene lingers at the tomb, still looking for Jesus. She

has lost her composure and is weeping. Two angels appear, yet somehow Mary still doesn't understand what is happening. They ask, "Why are you weeping?" She replies, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where to find him." (John 20:13)

Talk about lost keys. Jesus is the key to her happiness, the key to her comfort, the key to her worship, the key to the resurrection and the life. I can imagine losing lots of things, but only one would move me to tears: losing someone I loved dearly.

The story of Easter is not just about losing ourselves, it is also about being found. In the greatest of ironies, the One whom everyone else thought was lost turns out to be the One who finds Mary, who finds Peter, who finds all the disciples. Jesus shows up.

[9-Mary and Jesus] I honestly think Jesus is playing a bit of a practical joke on Mary. He says to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" (John 20:15) Can you imagine him smiling slightly? Mary thinks he's the gardener. I bet she doesn't even look closely at him. She just stands there, letting her tears fall to the ground.

"If you tell me where you've lain him, I'll go get him," she says, with a barely audible voice. How is Mary going to carry a fully-grown man? It's an impossible task. Go ahead and add it to the list of impossible things that already happened to this point: the stone rolling away, a body disappearing, and angels appearing out of nowhere. Sure, Mary, go get the body no one else has been able to find.

[10-Jesus] I love this next part. All it takes is one word for her to be found again. "Mary!" (John 20:16) That's it. Just her name. She sees Jesus, alive! Mary runs back to the disciples, full of awe, wonder and confidence, and says, "I have seen the Lord." (John 20:18)

Friends, what are you looking for today? I'm not talking about cell phones. I'm talking about something intangible, harder to find. Are you looking for forgiveness? For peace? For comfort? For abundant life?

[11-empty tomb] You won't find those in the tomb. The tomb is where we put things in the dark, trying to hide them. Sometimes we even try to hide ourselves in the darkness, away from those who want to love and support us.

Leave the tomb, friends. It's empty. The only thing you will find there is grave clothes. The tomb is where our sin and brokenness is buried.

Jesus is alive. He is looking for us. Truly, he has found us. Jesus isn't afraid of the dark. Neither is he afraid of death or the grave. He has overcome them all.

[12-women running] I don't know what you're looking for this Easter, but I can guess, like me, it would be nice to find hope. It would be even better if we found salvation. The good news we believe, here at Grace United Methodist Church, is simply this: we were lost and Jesus found us. God made a way for us to regain the loving relationship with him that was broken by our sin and pride. God sent his Son to find us, to save us, and to call our name. In Romans 10:13, we have this promise: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.”

Those who trust only in themselves will never be convinced that they are lost. They see no need for salvation. But they are only deceiving themselves. No one has it all together. That's why we all need Jesus.

[13-title slide] I pray you will find what you are looking for today: a Savior. I pray you will find Jesus in this place, and in your heart, and in your home, your family, your workplace, and your community. Deuteronomy 4:29 promises, “If...you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Don't look for the living among the dead. Don't look for life in a tomb. Look for the Living Son of God. It turns out, he's been right behind you all along. You just have to turn around, look, and say, “Lord. Master. Savior.”

Memory Verse: Luke 24:5-6 “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”

Reflection Questions:

1. What is something you lost and looked vainly for? Did you ever find it again? How did that make you feel?

2. What is a relationship you have lost? Why was it lost? Distance, time, conflict, death?
3. Why were the women and the disciples searching for Jesus at the tomb? What did they expect to find?
4. How has Jesus show up surprisingly in your life?
5. What does the resurrection mean for you? How has Jesus given you new life?