

## John 20:11-18

### Easter Transforms Us

*Jonathan M. Romig*  
[CornerstoneWestford.com](http://CornerstoneWestford.com)

Easter is a **happy day**. It's the happiest day in the **church calendar**. But it **didn't start the way**. That first Easter morning Jesus' followers were **grieving** and **heartbroken** because the one they loved died. Our story today starts with a grieving woman, **Mary Magdalene**, as she stands outside Jesus' tomb crying. She is mourning his death and that someone has stolen his body. In the gospels this word for "**weep**" is a **bitter, loud, wailing** (Matt 26:75; Mark 6:38). I've only heard 'this type' of weeping once in my life, and it was when a loved one died. *Easter is a happy day but the first Easter didn't start that way.*

That's where we are today. Right now we are going through a **global crisis**, a pandemic, the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Thousands of **people are dying ever week**. We've reached over 500,000 cases and 20,000 deaths in the US. **Statistics are turning into names** as people we know and care about are getting sick. **Everyone will know someone** hurt by this virus. So how can **our Easter**, celebrated in the **midst of sadness**, be a happy one?

It's the **same question** we ask of the first Easter. **What could possibly transform the first Easter**—a day marked by **sadness** and **grief**—into one **billions of people celebrate** around the **world**? What could possibly transform Mary Magdalene's **despair** into **complete joy**? It's the **same thing** that can **transform** our day today. **Easter transforms us**. Today, I want to talk you **four ways Easter transforms us**:

### 1) Easter offers us hope.

Easter takes us in our sadness and offers us hope.

#### **John 20:11-13a** (NIV)

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

When she goes to the tomb on Sunday morning instead of finding Jesus' body she finds the **stone rolled** away and two angels sitting on the **slab** where his body should have been. They should have been **dressed in black** for mourning, but instead they're dressed in **white**.<sup>1</sup> They're **not despairing**. They know **Jesus is alive**. They ask her, "Woman, why are you crying?" *They're offering her hope in her despair.*

**Mary Magdalene** really **needs hope**. If you read Mary's **history** in Mark and Luke's gospel accounts you'll see that when Mary met Jesus she was at a **really bad place**. When Jesus first met her she was **possessed by seven demons** (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). From what we know of **demon possession** in the rest of the Bible it **wasn't pretty**. One demon possessed man lived **naked** in the tombs and cut himself. (Mark 5:1-20). People possessed by demons often had incredibly **strength** or could be thrown around by the demons possessing them (Matt 17:14-20; Luke 4:31-37). Demons could cause people to be **mute** and **deaf**, so they couldn't speak or hear (Matt 9:32-33; 12:22). They acted **insane**. I wonder if Mary is **afraid** and **wondering** if she'll **go back to her old ways** with Jesus gone, if the **spirits will come back**. She **desperately needs hope**.

When the angels ask Mary, “Woman, why are you crying?” they’re **comforting her**; and **gently calling** her to **remember all that Jesus has done for her**. They’re reminder her that she was once **almost dead**, but **Jesus saved her**. If Jesus can save her, what makes her think he’s dead now? *Easter offers us hope.*

Jesus asks us the same question, “Why are you crying? Why are you upset? Why does COVID-19 bother you? Aren’t I alive? Haven’t I risen from the dead? Haven’t I saved you?” All we can say is, “Yes Lord. Help my unbelief. Resurrect hope in me.” *1) Easter transforms us by offering us hope.*

## 2) Easter surprises us with joy.

You ever been having a **really bad day** when someone you **love** or a **friend** surprises you? You’re so **mad** because the **traffic** was bad on your **commute** from your **bedroom** to your **upstairs office**, and to cheer you up your **husband** or **wife** makes you a really nice **breakfast**? **Bacon, eggs, pancakes**, with all the **fixins**— and it just transforms your day? Or maybe it’s at the **end of the day** and a **neighbor** or **friend** drops off a **meal** or your **child** drew you a **picture** to give you? Suddenly, a day that was **dead feels alive again**? Mary is about to have that happen to her. *Someone she knows and loves is about to surprise her with joy.*

**John 20:13b-14** (NIV)

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

When they were dating, my **sister-in-law** threw a **surprise Birthday** party for my brother Nathanael. I was tasked with getting him to the party. When I walked in ahead of Nathanael, I saw **heads pop** around counters ready to jump out and yell “**Surprise!**” Then they saw it was me and **ducked** back behind the counter. That’s what’s **happening to us** right now as we read. **We can see it! Jesus is alive, Mary!** Jesus is alive and he’s literally standing right behind you! What a surprise! Don’t you see him?! The angels see him! He’s right there! *You don’t need to be sad anymore. Jesus is alive.*

But isn’t that true for us?! Isn’t Jesus alive? Isn’t he **standing right beside us**, but we **can’t see him**? God promises us, “**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**” (Heb 13:5). He’s not here **physically**, but is here **spiritually** through the **Holy Spirit** (Matt 18:20). But she doesn’t see him because she thinks he’s a **gardener**. Maybe she **didn’t recognize him** because she has **tears** in her **eyes** or because when he **rose** from **death** Jesus had the **same body, only better**, a **glorified body** (1 Cor 15:35). But just because she **couldn’t recognize him** doesn’t mean he wasn’t there. Just because we **can’t see Jesus** doesn’t mean he’s not here. Jesus is here. Jesus is alive. Jesus loves us. This gives us **joy**. *1) Easter transforms us by offering us hope and 2) by surprising us with joy.*

## 3) Easter changes our perspective.

**John 20:15** (NIV)

15 He asked her, “Woman, 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.”

Mary Magdalene doesn’t get it. She doesn’t recognize the angels and she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. She’s **so wrapped up in her world** she **can’t see what God’s world** must be like. We get so wrapped up in **our world**, in our **pandemic**, in our **numbers** and **busyness** and **anxieties** that we also can’t see how **God is working through it**. What’s it going to take for **us to see God** and this world from **his perspective**? It’s going to take Jesus **rising** from the **dead** and **calling us by name**.

**John 20:16a** (NIV) Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

There was once a **little girl** who wanted to see a **hippopotamus**. She knew that they were at the **river** so she went down to the river to look for them. She got up on a **big rock** and began to look and look; but she could not find any **hippopotami**. But then the **rock** began to **move** and all at once she realized she was **standing** on a hippopotamus.<sup>2</sup> When Jesus said, “Mary!” he whole **world** must have **shook**. The ground beneath her feet must have swayed as she realized that **Jesus was alive** and **calling her by name**.

What can take a **terrible, no good, rotten pandemic day** and make it new? A **change in perspective**. The **good news** that Jesus is alive and one day will call you by your name. One day, when Christ returns, he'll **speak your name** and it will all be worth it (Rev 2:17). Even now, through the **Holy Spirit, Jesus is calling you by name**. The **Lord** of the **universe** knows you. Doesn't that **change the way you see life and reality**?

If you **don't know Jesus**, he wants to **give you a whole new perspective**. He wants you to **trust him**. He's telling you that he really has **risen** from the grave and that changes everything. Jesus is inviting you to know him, to let him speak your name. Come to him. Tell him your **brokenness** and **receive him**.

If you **do know Jesus**, he's calling you **again**. He's calling to to **keep trusting him**, to **keep walking with him**, to **keep believing him**, to **keep inviting him to change the way you see life**. You are **standing on Christ**, right now. **He's not just beside you. He's carrying you**. He is **baring the weight of your suffering**, of your **COVID**, of your **dark valley**. It's not just Easter that changes our perspective. It's **Jesus**.

*1) Easter transforms us by offering us hope, 2) by surprising us with joy, 3) by changing our perspective...*

#### **4) Easter gives us resurrection life.**

Mary was dead when she arrived at the tomb. She was **emotionally dead**. She had no hope. Jesus was lost. But suddenly, **Jesus is alive** and **his resurrection gives her resurrection life**.

**John 20:16** (NIV)

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

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

This is the moment when she realizes **he's alive** and calls him by the name she's **been calling him**, “Rabboni! Teacher!” Rabboni is a more **personal** way of saying rabbi. Not just “teacher” but “**my teacher!**”<sup>3</sup> She recognizes Jesus. Her eyes open and she realizes just like Jesus had the **power to cast out her demons** he has the **power to defeat death**. She realizes that **Jesus is alive!** It's this moment that **transforms a day of sadness and mourning** into a day of **life and joy**. Her day has turned from **death to life**.

She must have **fallen to his feet** and **clung** to him because Jesus stops her. He tells her she has to go and **tell others** about **his resurrection**—that he has risen from the tomb.

**John 20:17-18** (NIV)

17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Notice Jesus doesn't just say, “I'm going to my Father” but “I'm going to my Father and your Father.” To be a **child of God** is to **have life**. To have **God as your Father** is to **have resurrection life** (John 17:3). She was a woman who was once haunted by **seven demons** and is now a child of God the Father. That's the same thing Jesus is offering you and me today—**resurrection life** through a **relationship with the Father**. She has this **new life** and goes to **tell others**.

18 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.

She doesn't just say, “I've seen Jesus” or “I've seen the Rabbi” but “I have seen the Lord!” In other words, “I've seen **God!** I've seen the **one** who **conquers sin and death** and can **give us all eternal life!**” *Easter (Jesus) gives us resurrection life.*

In Steven Spielberg's famous movie, *Jaws*, the second victim the great white shark kills is a young boy named **Alex Kintner**, played by **Jeffrey Voorhees**. On a warm summer day, he is plucked from the waters of a busy beach. When the crowd realizes what has happened, there's a **panic**, and everyone in the water goes running back to the safety of the beach. **Mrs. Kintner, Alex's mother**, stumbles around in the shallows calling for Alex, but he **doesn't return**.

Later in the movie Mrs. Kintner dresses herself in **black widows garb**, approaches the **chief of police** (the hero of the movie), and **slaps** him in the face for not closing the beaches. She says, “I just found out that a girl got killed here last week, and you knew it. You knew there was a shark out there. You knew it was **dangerous**, but you let people go swimming anyways. You knew all those things, but **still my boy is dead** now, and there's nothing you can do about it. My boy is dead.”

**Imdb.com**, a film and television, website, picks up the story many years later.

Several decades after the release of *Jaws* (1975), Lee Fierro, who played Mrs. Kintner, walked into a **seafood restaurant** and noticed that the menu had an “**Alex Kintner Sandwich**.” She commented that she had played his **mother** so many years ago; the **owner** of the restaurant **ran out to meet her**, and he was none other than Jeffrey Voorhees, who had played her son. They had **not seen each other since the original movie shoot**.

When the **jaws of death clamped over Jesus**, it must have felt like **all was lost; for Jesus and all of his followers, including Mary Magdalene**. When Jesus rose again; it was like that **great evil had never been**; and suddenly the **world was restored**. If **you believe in Jesus**, one day you will be reunited with your **loved ones** who **know him too** as you too will **rise** from the **grave**.

*Easter transforms us four ways: 1) by offering us hope, 2) by surprising us with joy, 3) by changing our perspective, and 4) by giving us resurrection life. At the end of the day Easter transforms us because...*

### ***Easter gives us Jesus.***

**Jesus defeats the jaws of death on the cross.** Jesus is **alive** and he is **calling you by name**. He is offering you hope and joy, a change of perspective, and eternal life. Most of all he is **offering you himself**. *Easter transforms us because Easter gives us Jesus.*

#### **Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)**

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

**“Message me on Facebook if you want to talk or email me at [jonathan@cornerstonewestford.com](mailto:jonathan@cornerstonewestford.com).**

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message on Facebook Live during the 2020 COVID-19 (Coronavirus) lockdown in Massachusetts. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).*

## Discussion Questions

You and your family or friends can use these group discussion questions to talk through today's sermon and Bible passage. Please use whatever questions you find helpful.

1. How does Easter give you hope?
2. How have you felt this week leading up to Easter with everything going on in our world?
3. What are some of the things Jesus has done for you? How is your story similar or different than Mary Magdalene's?
4. How do you keep holding onto faith in Christ when you can't see him?
5. What kind of things can God do? Would you ever imagine him bringing someone back from the dead?
6. What does it mean, "Jesus is calling you by name"? What does that say about his knowledge of you? What would it take for you to call him by his name in a similar way?
7. Do you believe Jesus is alive? How does your belief or disbelief impact how you live?
8. How does the promise of one day rising again with Jesus change how you live today?
9. How does Jesus defeating the jaws of death give you hope for what we're going through right now?
10. What do you think of today? How do you feel about Easter 2020 in light of Jesus' resurrection?

End your discussion by praying for Jesus to work through the COVID-19 pandemic. Ask him to save lives, both physically and for all eternity. Pray that Jesus would use this time to further his kingdom and bring our neighbors, friends, and family to him.

<sup>1</sup> IVP New Testament Backgrounds Commentary.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *Peculiar People* by Rodney Clapp p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> Pillar Commentary on John.