

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Sermon: "When He Called Her Name"

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Rev. Steve Filyk

March 29, 2026

Opener: Jesus Christ is risen today 243

Choruses: O Praise The Name (Anástasis), Revelation Song

[Choir (after sermon): In Christ Alone

Communion Hymn: This I Believe (The Creed)

Closer: Thine be the glory 258

Easter

Communion

Today we are celebrating the strange and unexpected:
Jesus's resurrection from the dead.

For many people today,
the resurrection can feel as hard to believe
as stories of alien abductions.

But today's reading from the Gospel of John
Doesn't present Jesus' resurrection like a myth or legend
Or imaginative storytelling.
It presented as an unlikely and unexpected happening
That is corroborated by a wide variety of evidence.

That this was unexpected is made clear by today's reading.

Mary Magdalene has made her way to the graveyard early in the morning.
When she arrives at Jesus' tomb and finds it empty
she goes back to the other disciples and laments that
Someone has "taken the Lord out of the tomb."

Mary doesn't jump to a conclusion that Jesus' has been resurrected,
She assumes the most natural thing—
that someone has moved the body.

Despite what you might have learned
From Montey Python's "The Life of Brian"
The people of the ancient world weren't uneducated or simple.

Jewish law required multiple witnesses for major claims.
Thucydides emphasized eyewitness testimony and careful investigation.
Aristotle developed formal logic and systems of reasoning still used today

People in Jesus' time weren't naive.
They knew the difference between myth, legend, and history—
even if they described those categories differently than we do.
When it came to the possibility of resurrection,
There were very few that imagined its possibility.

Bible Scholar NT Wright notes that
"[Resurrection was spoken of] in the classical world of Greece and Rome,
as something one might imagine but which never actually occurred,
and never could or would.

He notes further that while some of
"The Jews... began to believe that it would...
[Those who believed, thought] it would happen to all God's people all at
once...
Not... to one person in the middle of time.
This would be an odd, outlandish event, unimagined, unheard-of.
[NT Wright, John for Everyone: Part II 142]

To summarize, resurrection was not a commonly held belief
And even among the Jews who held it,
It was understood to be something that would occur
Among all people the Jewish people,
at the end of time.

And yet what happens on Easter morning
Is that disciples who never expected resurrection
start realising that it has happened to their crucified Lord.

What gives birth to this belief?
First there is the empty tomb.

After his crucifixion the Gospel writer
Tells us that Jesus' body was buried
By Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.
In a garden near the place of crucifixion;
That they "wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen
in accordance with Jewish burial customs." [John 19:40 NIV]

Tombs "In this this area [were] often covered by a disk-shaped rock,
a yard/meter in diameter, requiring multiple people to move it."
[Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible 1854]
This begs the question of who moved the stone
And what happened to Jesus' body.

This empty tomb demands an explanation.
And while this alone wouldn't lead many
To image resurrection there is more.

Peter and the beloved disciple, commonly believed to be John,
Race to the tomb to confirm what Mary Magdalene had said
About Jesus body being missing.
When they arrived at the tomb they enter it
And to their amazement find strips of linen 'lying there'
As well as the cloth that had been used to wrap Jesus' head.

These details matter.

If someone had stolen Jesus' body,
It would be strange for the body snatchers
To remove the coverings
that would have made him easy to carry.

And if someone had raided the tomb
To steal whatever was of value
It makes no sense to leave the costly linens

Or even more expensive spices.
[DA Carson The Gospel According to John 637]

Additionally, the description of the linen suggests
That it was like Jesus body had "passed through his grave-clothes,
Spices and all." [DA Carson 637]

When John enters the tomb
We are told that "He saw and believed". [John 20:8]
For John this evidence is enough to provoke belief
That a resurrection has occurred.

But more evidence is needed for Mary.
Mary is overwhelmed by her grief.
While Peter and John return to where they were staying
Mary lingers in the cemetery.

When she looks again into the tomb
she sees angels dressed in white
One at the head and the other at the foot
Of where Jesus body had been laid.
Now for children of the enlightenment,
this sounds fantastic, extraordinary.
Angels? Really?

While this make strike you as unbelievable,
I had at least a couple of people here at St. Andrew's
Tell me stories about angels.
"Angels regularly appear as human visitors in the Old Testament.
In this case they are not merely interpretive angels...
but evidence that God himself has been at work." [DA Carson 640]

But even a vision of angel isn't convincing for Mary.
When they ask why she is crying,
She again laments that someone has taken away Jesus,
That she is looking for her Lord.

Turning away from the tomb
 She sees a man who she assumes to be the gardener
 And when he asks why she is crying,
 She asks if he has taken away Jesus.
 “Sir, if you have carried him away,
 tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” [John 20:15]

While the writer tells us this is Jesus,
 There is something about him that keeps his identity
 Hidden from her in this first exchange.
 Like subsequent post-resurrection appearances,
 There is a degree of continuity and discontinuity
 Between the Jesus the disciples knew,
 And their now-resurrected Lord.
 For her part Mary can't see past this discontinuity.

PAUSE.

Mary sees the empty tomb.
 She views the linens.
 Mary hears the angels.
 She even sees Jesus.

But still despite all of this evidence
 She cannot grasp what has occurred.

But then Jesus calls her by her name: “Mary”.
 And in that moment, everything changes.
 She hears her name—and she knows it's him.
 She had been looking for a dead body
 But now she can see that her Lord is risen.

It's not just the evidence in front of her—
 But it is Jesus calling her by name that allows her to see.
 Mary proves what Jesus had declared earlier in John's Gospel:
 “My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me” (John 10:3–4)

Mary is then given the task of being the Apostle to the Apostles.
 Jesus sends her back to the other disciples,
 To tell them that Jesus is ascending to his Father,
 Who is now their Father as well.

PAUSE

There are other evidences of Jesus' resurrection
 That are alluded to in today's reading.
 The Gospel writer notes that the disciples
 “still did not understand from Scripture
 That Jesus had to rise from the dead.” [John 20:9 NIV]

That is, after realising that Jesus had been raised,
 They will start to notice how this was foretold in Scripture.
 More than that they will start remembering how Jesus
 Also spoke about it when he was with them.
 What we learn from Mary's story is that
 Easter isn't just the claim
 that something impossible happened—
 it's the moment when a living Savior calls people by name.
 Mary stood in front of all the evidence and still didn't see,
 until she heard, ‘Mary.’
 And everything changed.

That same Jesus still speaks today—
 not just to inform you, but to know you,
 to call you out of grief, confusion, and doubt into life.
 On Easter the risen Christ does more than prove something—
 he calls you by name, and in hearing him, you will find life.

Do you hear him calling yours?
 May it be so. Amen.