

Easter

John 20:1-18

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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." <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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." <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>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." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>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.'" <sup>18</sup>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.

In the great labyrinth of faith, we have just arrived at its very center. In the flow of the liturgical journey through the year, we are now at its pivotal point. As in an hourglass, there is room above and room below for the fine sand to shift around, but at its center, the hourglass narrows to a point which is only a few grains wide. In the Christian liturgical year, we are now at that very narrow point where everything which comes before is an anticipation of this moment, and everything which follows is a reflection of this moment. The Day of Resurrection. The Day of Belief. The day in

which the man Jesus, and the Jesus who was divine, was revealed in his ultimate completeness. An incredible event. An amazing event. A beautiful event.

Ever since its earliest days, belief has been at the center of the Christian faith. Believe. Do not doubt. Believe. Do not doubt. Belief and doubt – this is what it is about. Over the centuries as the Christian faith was passed from generation to generation the theme continued. Belief and doubt in a continual dance around each other, mingled in unending combinations within individuals, within communities of faith, within even the most faithful. “I believe. Help my unbelief.” “The disciples gathered at the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” The disciple Thomas could not believe until he saw the resurrected Jesus. Belief and doubt.

Over the centuries as the world changed, the nature of belief changed as well. With the Enlightenment came a hunger for knowledge – a hunger for understanding. With the Reformation being a child of the Enlightenment, belief in Christ seemed to shift from the heart to the brain. Analysis of the faith went into high gear with the exceptionally brilliant scholars looking deeply into the faith, describing the nuances of the faith in detail in their thousands upon thousands of pages of theological analysis. Belief shifted from a knowing as one would know a good friend to a knowing in the manner of a trained technician knowing the internal workings of my computer. Similar, but different. And not necessarily bad. But different. The most dramatic aspect of the shift has surrounded the concept of salvation – of being saved – the going to heaven rather than the going to hell. For many, the role of belief has become *the* criteria for salvation. You must believe in order to be saved. But even more than that, you have to

believe the right things in order to be saved. Belief has taken on an immensely central role in the Christian faith. The casualties of the shift too often have been the Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. The casualties of the shift too often have been the forgetting of the definition of the Kingdom of God: the feeding of the hungry, the giving drink to the thirsty, the welcoming of the stranger, the clothing the naked, the caring for the sick, the visiting of those in prison. Belief has too often been seduced into adhering to correct doctrine – seduced away from a faithful and humble knowing. Belief has too often become centered on something we do rather than a responding to what God has done.

So we gather this morning on this, the holiest of days: the Day of Resurrection. The event we celebrate today is at the very heart of the faith. Jesus the Christ is One with God. Certainly beyond human understanding, but not beyond human knowing. Somehow we know. Maybe we cannot explain, but somehow we know. We believe. We believe.

Every once in a while I wonder what would happen if the paradigm was turned all the way around. What if it was all about God believing in us? From the human perspective, an atheist does not believe that God exists, so from an atheist's perspective there is no God. What if God did not believe we existed? So sad. From the human perspective, an agnostic does not really think about God or maybe does not really care one way or another. An agnostic essentially ignores God. What if God did not care if we existed? What if God essentially ignored humanity? So lonely. From the human perspective, we can often put tremendous efforts into analyzing and defining God. What if all God was interested in was how our genetic makeup was functioning,

interested in how many people were born and how many died on a certain day, and kept charts to analyze how life was functioning on our little planet? So distant.

But there is more. There *has* to be more. Is it possible that God believes in us? The answer is celebrated this morning. God came to be one with us. God walked among us. God has called to us. God has forgiven us. God deeply loves us. God believes in us. God does believe in us. This is why the faithful over the centuries have greeted each other with these words:

He is Risen!!!!