

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

April 5, 2026 – SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION / EASTER, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Light in our Darkness*”*

Acts 10:34-43 (God raised Jesus from the dead so that forgiveness could be preached to all nations)
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (A psalm of praise for God’s marvelous works)
Colossians 3:1-4 (We have been raised with Christ, and so are to seek heavenly things)
St. John 20:1-18 (Jesus’ followers find the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Lord)

Christ is risen. Happy Easter! “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” For Christians, Easter is the high point of our rejoicing. Resurrection Sunday is the center of the Christian calendar. Christmas, Epiphany, and Lent all lead up to it; Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday depend upon it.

But to be clear, we are not here to worship a day. We are here to rejoice in the One to whom this day points us: Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior of all who believe in, and trust Him. On Easter morning, we seek—and find—the living Lord among us. Today, that assurance comes to us in St. John’s Gospel, Chapter 20, when Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus’ tomb “while it is still dark.” After realizing the tomb is empty, she runs back to Simon Peter and John—the disciple whom Jesus loved—and cries out: “They have taken the Lord and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Later, Mary returns to the tomb where she finds two angels in white sitting inside it. They ask her “Woman, why are you weeping?” Moments later, the risen Jesus asks her the same question: “Woman, why are you weeping?” Utterly failing to recognize Him, she solemnly asks, “Sir... tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Then, Jesus says to her, “Mary!”

We know it’s Easter morning, but Mary does not. Although though the dawn has come, it is still dark for Mary; she believes Jesus is still dead. Perhaps like Mary, this is a dark time for you. You may be grieving over the chaos and evil in the world, or mourning the loss of a loved one. It could be that your health conditions cause you to feel disheartened. Celebrating Easter with great joy does not mean we pretend everything is fine in the world *or* our lives. We are called to believe Christ is with us even “while it is still dark.” There are days where we can barely make out any light at all. Days when *our* journey feels more like walking into the tomb.

God does not expect us to deny our struggles. Rather, Jesus *joins us* in our suffering. He suffers *with us*. Not only does Jesus does suffer *with us*, but He also suffered *for us*, so that the darkness of evil and the grief of brokenness will no longer have the last word. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death, and now the Light of the World has arisen, to live and shine forever in our lives.

Let’s go back to Mary weeping at Jesus’ tomb. At least she thought she could come here to lean on the stone, sensing Jesus nearby. Like Mary, many people feel comforted by visiting the grave of a loved one, to sit and remember them, even talk to them. But Mary finds the stone removed and Jesus is not there!

If you’ve been following Christ for awhile, you’ll understand her astonishment, because God is often surprising! We may prefer the predictability of Jesus staying put, remaining in the tomb. But we cannot keep Him in a box, certainly not a box made for death. He is risen and active, moving in the world and in our lives. And guess what? We don’t *need a predictable* God. We need a *trustworthy* God. And God is *absolutely* worthy of our trust. When everything seems dark or feels out of control, we *can* trust that the Light of Christ is still with us and leading us—even if we cannot perceive it.

Let's return to the encounter between the risen Lord and Mary Magdelene. He calls her by name, using only one word, "Mary." After all, He is the Word of God who spoke the entire universe into creation, and here He chooses to say the one word that will open her eyes and make *her* a new creation: "Mary." Jesus restores all that Mary has lost, simply by speaking her name, because in that one word is contained all the forgiveness, healing, love and relationship they had shared before His crucifixion.

We, too, encounter Jesus in many ways—through Scripture, prayer, silence, community with other believers, and in the Holy Eucharist. And if we are quiet and manage to be still before God, we may hear Christ calling *our* name, too. Like Mary, when you are seeking Him through your tears, questions, and doubts, Jesus speaks the only word you know is spoken personally *to you*. Your name. When we come to know Christ and remain in a relationship with Him, we do hear Him calling our name, and calling us to share the good news of Easter with everyone we know.

We don't have to start debates. We don't have to wait for others to recognize God before we include them in our church family. What we *can* do is embrace them with the unconditional love of God. We can show them who God is by living out the values of God's kingdom, caring for them patiently and humbly until Jesus speaks *their* name, the Holy Spirit convinces them of the Truth, and God the Father draws them to His enormous heart.

Think about it: Mary is recognized by Jesus before she recognizes Him. That's how it works with our salvation. Jesus knows us before we know Him, and He always makes the first move. Everything changes when Jesus speaks Mary's name. He restores their relationship, but He isn't finished. Jesus also gives her a new identity, just as when *we* come to the Lord, He gives *us* a new identity.

He says 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.'" Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's bringing Mary into His own relationship with His Father, moving beyond a mere earthly friendship. She is now his sister because Jesus' Father is her Father, too. She has become a child of God. And that's how God transforms *us* when we believe.

We read this story on Easter morning to teach us about how faithful God is. To remind us that He will never leave us or forsake us. And perhaps most important, that in and through Jesus Christ, death is not final—it is only the entrance to new and eternal life.

I'll close with some more good news from Ephesians (2:4-6 LB). St. Paul writes:

"God is so rich in mercy; he loved us so much that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins, he gave us back our lives again when he raised Christ from the dead—only by his undeserved favor have we ever been saved—and lifted us up from the grave into glory along with Christ, where we sit with him in the heavenly realms—all because of what Christ Jesus did."

Let us rejoice now and always that Jesus Christ—our Light in the darkness—has lifted us up and into His own relationship with God the Father, and in doing so, our Savior has rescued us from sin and death *forever*.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia, alleluia!