

Skip to the good part

(SLIDE: Behold) There was a time. There was a time before. A time when life was difficult. A time when things were in parts and pieces. There was a time when there was something known as a VCR, **(SLIDE: VCR)** and it meant not only did you have to rewind the movie when you were done, but it meant that it was difficult to skip ahead. Because all you could see when you pushed “stop” and “fastforward” was a blue screen, and you’d guess if you’d gotten through the boring part.

Either way, now the world makes sense. Now, you can just skip to the good part. You don’t have to relive what happened to Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, you just get to leave Tatooine. Thanks to streaming on the internet, we don’t only get to choose whatever we want to watch at any time, but we get to choose which part. It’s like Palm Sunday Easter. And then, even within the Easter story, how we like to skip ahead.

A personal spirituality

This story in John is perhaps the best-known Resurrection story in the Gospels. You can read it as a sweeping romance if you are so inclined. We can start with Mary, alone in the garden. **(SLIDE: Woman alone, trees)** We can imagine what that’s like – her sorrow, her longing. Then, we can cut right to the softly-and-tenderly-Jesus-is-calling moment. We jump right from Mary as lone seeker, to Mary as great beholder. Mary looking him in the eyes, and calling him Rabbi. It is an incredibly person moment of those of us who prefer a more personal relationship with God. **(SLIDE: Shadow of couple)** It is evidence for those of us who read the *DiVinci Code*, and think that Dan Brown is a historian. And it is support for the spiritual-but-not-religious mindset, **(SLIDE: Man reaching up)** because if the sum of our lives is to seek and *behold* tender moments with the divine, then isn’t that easiest to do on our own? It’s easier to find that peace, that quiet center without anyone else around.

So let’s skip the rest of this service and each of us find our Secret Garden equivalent where we can chill out, and divine why.

Or, we can really look at scripture. We can look at this short passage from beginning to end, and if we do, we see that there’s more than just Mary alone in the garden.

Mary may be alone at the start, but when she sees that the body is missing she goes right back to her community. **(SLIDE: Woman running)** To John and Simon Peter. The disciple whom Jesus loved, and the disciple with whom Mary is most pissed off. And for good reason – Peter disappointed her. **(SLIDE: I’m tired of people)** All of them, actually, have disappointed her. They have fallen short of being the beloved community. They have fallen short of being as perfect as her own personal Jesus.

I wonder if there’s anybody in this room who knows how Mary feels. I wonder if you ever found that another person fell short of your expectations. Anybody ever lived with somebody? Anybody ever worked somebody? Anybody ever gone to church, and found that – strangely enough – it wasn’t all Jesus, all the time. Rather, that, that church had lots of imperfect people being petty with each other?

Does anybody know how Mary feels? People are difficult. People disappoint. Community disappoints. No wonder we like that imagine of Mary alone in the garden with Jesus. The lure of a personal spirituality without all the difficulty of intentional human community is not just romantic. It’s aspirational.

The need for community

And yet, Mary wakes up John and Peter. Maybe she woke Peter up with a kick to the ribs, but she woke him up. Why? Perhaps it is because Mary is Middle Eastern. Unlike we, most of us being so unabashedly Western, Mary does not believe that the individual comes first. She knows that human beings were created to live together. **(SLIDE: Group of people praying)** To share their lives together. To discern and fight about their faith and politics together. She doesn’t think first and foremost about her own personal

experience and preferences. She doesn't even walk away when she is angry, because she knows that utterly misses the point. She knows that community, relationships with other people, mean nothing if you only stick around while you're feeling it, while you have nothing better to do.

I've often wondered why Jesus doesn't appear to Mary initially. She's alone in the garden, then she gets John and Peter, and then she runs back to the garden, and it's only *after* that, that Jesus arrives. Why doesn't Jesus appear to Mary when she first sees the empty tomb? Is Jesus withholding? Does he *like* watching her grieve unnecessarily? Or did he have errands to run?

Or... or is it that Mary is not ready to see him? Is it that Mary cannot see him until she goes back and looks at her sisters and brothers, especially the ones with whom she is less than pleased? Is it that the love of God by nature requires us to hang in there with one another? Is it, that the resurrected Body of Christ is so communal that it can only be discovered in community?

The Body of Christ

Yes. Yes. Jesus' ministry was never for any one person. And more than that the resurrected Body of Christ requires community, because it *is* community. This is the Body of Christ. Us, here, together. **(SLIDE: Corinthians quote)**

And without *this* Body of Christ, without the Body of Christ that is a living, breathing community, than Easter is just the anniversary of a one-time event that happened a long time ago. And it's so much more than that. Resurrection is *this* moment, and that moment, and every moment in which Christ's self draws us together in one body. So we need community, we need the church, we need to share our faith as much as we need our limbs, our digits, the other cells, our organs, every part of our bodies. We need community, because that is what makes us human. That is what makes us participants in a story that matters.

Here's the thing about skipping ahead in a movie. If it's a good movie, all the parts matter. Every moment is intricate to the story line, and you need to go through the entire thing to arrive at the deepest meaning. That's what the story of our faith is, too. It's not just about seeking and beholding those great "me-and-my-God" moments. It's about integrating the divine into every aspect of our lives. It's about going on the journey together, in which we bring our grief, as well as our joy, and we find that over time, over the good times and the difficult times, we are utterly transformed.

That is the work of the church – to work together to be more like Christ in a way that transforms the world. The church sometimes does live up to that mission, but it's Jesus' job to do the impossible. He's the one who rises again. Our job is just to practice. Our task is to practice Resurrection – to practicing showing up for each other, even after we've disappointed each other. Our job is to practice loving each other even when it's not beautiful and easy. Our job is to practice bringing our grief and sorrow and wonder and joy, and know that it is all held in the love of Christ Jesus, who unites us more and more as one.

Integrating Easter

Beloved, this is the mystery of Easter, and we will practice living into that mystery this Easter season. **(SLIDE: Body with cogs)** If you are someone who finds that your life is disjointed, who finds that you may have faith, or hope, or even just moderate interest in the story of Jesus, but you're not sure how it fits in your life. Good News – we're figuring that out, too. And for the next seven weeks, we're going to practice doing that. We're going to practice how to integrate resurrection into our daily lives.

If you're someone whose life is so packed that you can't possibly think of another thing – it was difficult enough just getting here today – more Good News. Faith – and participating in a community of faith – is

not just one additional thing to add to your life. It is the very thing that makes all the other things makes sense. Resurrection – new life, the presence of the divine in our midst – is the thing that makes all the other things have meaning. And a journey of faith – with you beautifully imperfect Christian family – is the thing that gives life purpose.

Christ has risen. And Christ is here. Let us practice living together in a community of faith. Let us practice resurrection by returning to each other, by sharing the news, by bringing our broken selves that we find wholeness as the Body of Christ together.