

Easter 2026

John 20:11-18

April 5, 2026

North Decatur Presbyterian Church

Rev. David Lewicki, preaching

Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb, ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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,^[b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[c] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not touch 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.’ ” ¹⁸ 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.

Two realities meet on this and every Easter morning: one is emptiness and the other is fullness.

The gospels agree that emptiness is the first Easter reality. We don’t know who was first to the tomb—you can probably bet on it these days—the women, Mary, Peter, the Beloved Disciple? Whomever arrived there that morning, they found it empty.

An empty tomb. A hole in the ground. An absence. I wonder if you know emptiness? Yes there’s the emptiness of your wallet after you take the kids to the Magic Kingdom. There’s the refrigerator when your teenager brings their friends home. These are empty things. But I’m thinking more about the emptiness of a promise someone made and did not keep. I’m talking about the chair where your beloved used to sit before they died. I’m thinking about a feeling, inside you, that this world only disappoints. You do what we’re supposed to do, but things still fall apart. That’s the emptiness of Easter.

This emptiness has emotional weight. The light of the world, Jesus, is gone. The emptiness intensifies when his body goes missing. If we at least have the body, we can grieve. Instead we have nothing.

But of course, emptiness is only half of the Easter story.

Mary chooses to linger near the emptiness. She does not contemplate it: she weeps for it. She grieves her loss and her grieving—all of our grieving—is a groping, a feeling in the dark toward an understanding of the emptiness itself. Hurt, injustice, violence, loss. Mary weeps over the loss of the One whose being filled her life with love.

As she weeps, something changes. Something changes in the tomb, something changes in her, something changes in the fabric of the universe. It is God at work in the emptiness. It is the movement of the Great Love, stitching back together what has been torn. God takes the reality of emptiness and changes it forever.

When Mary peers into the tomb to confirm Love's absence, she is met by angelic presence. They ask her, "why are you weeping, Mary?" Like many questions in John's gospel, it's not a question you answer so much as it is a question that points you somewhere, that points you in the direction you should be going. "You're weeping because you believe something about Jesus, about the world, about yourself. But is there something else?"

Mary turns around. A simple action, but one full of meaning for her and for you. Mary turns around to face the world anew, and she sees "Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus." She sees, but she does not know. How is that possible? This new creation that God has been making in the dark takes time for you to recognize. Mary is confounded that the tomb is not empty; she is just as confused by the man standing outside it who should be in it. She can see Jesus—you can see Jesus—and not know this is the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus now asks Mary, "why are you weeping?" She sees him as a gardener, which, as the Creator and Cultivator of Life, he is.

Then Jesus says the word that changes her: "Mary." Her own name. The ones who know our names are the ones who love us. Hearing her name spoken, she is known and loved. "I know my own, my own know me." Being known deeply, being loved fully, this is life in all of its fullness.

Mary is in the presence of the Love that Created the World, the Love that is the center of all wisdom, the Love that defines what is true, the Love that heals the sick, feeds 5000 hungry, opens blind eyes, companions the lonely, befriends its enemies, forgives recklessly, spills outward like living water, the Love that swallows death—this is that Love. It is also the Love that knows Mary's name.

That is the Easter story. There was an unfathomable emptiness. In the dark, quiet of Easter morning, the fullness of God arrives. You don't see it, you can't, not at first. But when Love calls your name, the world is never the same. The Risen Christ is here with you. Not just here. Everywhere.

"I have seen the Lord," Mary says. Let the church say "Alleluia, Amen."