

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: John 20:1-18

I told you last week that Sunday is coming, and here it is; AND it's just not any Sunday—it's Resurrection Sunday! Hallelujah! This is GREAT News! Because Jesus conquered death, we have the assurance of new life, everlasting life, if we choose to believe and follow the living Christ.

I went to college later in life. Our oldest son was in college when I took classes. We both attended Elizabethtown College. By chance, one time we both had a morning 8:30 class—not the same class. Nick commuted from home. One morning he left for his class before I left.

I don't remember how long he was gone when I suddenly heard the fire siren go off. Immediately, I thought about Nick. I thought the worst. I was concerned that he had been in an accident. It did not help things when the fire trucks went speeding past our house, down the road in the direction we traveled to get to the college. My heart began to pound.

I left for my class. I came to a dangerous intersection where many accidents happened before, and there, indeed, was an accident. That's where I found the fire trucks and police. Now I was really worried. As the police directed us around the activity, I tried to see if our son's car was one of the vehicles in the accident. I didn't see his car.

But that did not satisfy my worry. I guess I didn't believe my eyes—perhaps afraid I didn't see everything at the site of the accident. When I got to the college. I almost ran to the commuters' lounge to see if Nick was there. He wasn't. So, I quickly made my way to the building where his class was held. I eventually found Nick in the computer room of that building. Finally, after seeing him and talking to him, I felt at peace and was able to go on with my day.

When I think back on that day, I feel kind of silly. I wonder why I didn't believe my eyes when I did not see Nick's car at the accident site. It took seeing him and hearing his voice to finally convince me that he was okay.

Mary's experience that morning at the tomb where Jesus' body was put to rest was similar. Her distress over Jesus' body being gone was understandable. Just the thought of the possibility that someone stole Jesus' body was heart wrenching. It's a curious that that the scripture leaves us thinking that Mary was not stunned when she found angels where Jesus' body should have been. That certainly would have caught my attention. She was more disturbed that his body was gone.

And then, when Mary turned from the tomb, she did not recognize that the man standing in front of her was Jesus. Why she did not recognize him until he spoke to her has often wondered me. Didn't she look at him? If she did, I guess I think she would have recognized him. Besides, Jesus told his followers that he would return in three days. Mary was a follower; she surely knew this. And, really, if Jesus could bring Lazarus back from the dead after being in a tomb for a few days, wouldn't she have thought it was possible that Jesus could do the same for himself? I suppose, however, I can understand why the possibility of Jesus returning from the dead would have been hard to conceive, especially after the torture his body suffered during the crucifixion.

Because we know how the story ends, it's too easy for us to criticize Mary's inability to recognize Jesus. We know from the Word that Jesus arose from the grave, and he lives forevermore, yet, like Mary, don't you think we too find it difficult to recognize Jesus' presence in our own lives? Of course, like Mary, we sometimes cannot see him standing right in front of us.

April 9, 2023 - "He Lives!"

Like Mary, who knew Jesus' body was put in that tomb, we can be distracted by what we understand, or by what we are convinced we know. We can get tunnel vision and never consider the possibility that Jesus could be standing right in front of us saying something like... "You think you know everything, but listen to me; you don't. I am here with you, and I want to show you something better." That essentially is what happened to Mary when she finally recognized Jesus, he turned her nightmare into the best outcome she could have ever imagined, Jesus was alive.

Also, like Mary, we might miss seeing Jesus in our lives when our emotions are so overwhelming that we find it impossible to focus on anything other than what has us upset. Hard times, physical or emotional pain, anger or frustration can thrust us into crying out for Jesus' help and companionship, but if we continue to listen only to the cry of our own voice rather than listening for his voice, we miss Jesus again.

Likewise, we can get so very excited and happy about something good in our lives that we totally miss recognizing Jesus' presence and guidance that led us to the reason for our delight, and we neglect the opportunity to thank Jesus for our good fortune and joy. Sometimes, our emotions potentially become our own worst enemy.

I am one of those people who hates to get a shot. Even to this day after receiving many shots throughout my lifetime, needles scare me. Whenever I get one, I get myself worked up and then when the moment arrives, I look the other way and brace myself for the needle to pierce my skin.

There was one time, however, when I had a totally different experience. It happened shortly after I delivered our first son. As my labor intensified, my blood pressure skyrocketed. The doctor was very concerned. So as soon as Nick was born, a nurse stuck me with a needle and gave me some medicine to help bring down my blood pressure. I was so overjoyed and excited about our baby, that I never even noticed that the nurse gave me an injection until after it was over, and I saw her dispose of the syringe. We can block all kinds of things out when we are consumed by our emotions, even Jesus.

We may also miss seeing Jesus in our lives because we are simply facing the wrong direction. We may have drifted away from God's straight and narrow path. We may have given into the pleasures of this world. We may have stopped praying, reading our bible or attending church, and simply lost touch with Jesus.

We may not realize, or want to realize we are facing the wrong direction until our world comes crashing down around us, and by that point we are almost too ashamed to turn and face the right direction, and look at the face of Jesus. Amazingly, Jesus doesn't care. He's just glad we finally turned around.

Our Savior, Jesus lives. He is always with us. He lives within and through us. He conquered death and walks with us each and every day. He's ready to help us conquer the battles we face in our lives. We're never alone. He's ready to point the way that will lead us down the road that will ensure our life journey will be a precursor to an everlasting life with him and our Heavenly Father.

Jesus lives! Look for him in your life. Listen for his voice calling your name. Amen.