Sermon – "Where Joy and Sorrow Meet"
Scripture Readings – Isaiah 25:6-9, John 20:1-18
Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025
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Listen to the events of the first Easter morning as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 20. Hear now God's Holy Word.

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

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look 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? For whom are you looking?"
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." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and
said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 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.' " 18 Mary Magdalene
went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord;" and she told them that the Risen
Christ had said these things to her. Amen.

The title of the sermon: "Where Joy and Sorrow Meet"

The text: Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" John 20:15

Let us pray: As we gather at the place where joy and sorrow meet, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Risen Lord. Amen.

In 2006, the year Peter's father died, the Denham Kieffer Family traveled to Italy with my parents on an epic journey to meet my father's Italian relatives in Torino and to visit Pietrasanta, a coastal city where Peter's dad learned to carve marble. The journey took us to places of joy and sorrow. We gathered at a place of joy in the home of our cousin Paolo Decarlini who hosted our family for dinner and granted my mother the privilege of playing his

mother's piano. We gathered at a place of sorrow, sipping wine along the Mediterranean Sea, as we toasted the life of Peter's father with his good friend and mentor, artist Richardo Bremmer.

Since that journey, we have stayed connected annually through Christmas greetings. In 2023 Paolo's greeting included words about his mother which I found very meaningful two years after my mother died.

He wrote, "My mother is fine, although she has lost interest in active life as she prepares to leave this world. When we are little children, our parents teach us how to live, when we are grownup, they teach us how to die."

What greater gift can we receive from those who love us than to learn how to live and how to die. On this Easter morning as we gather at the place where joy and sorrow meet, these words ring particularly true about our Lord and Savior. As much as Christ has taught us how to live, to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God, Christ has also taught us how to die.

The courage with which Christ walked his own "Via Dolorosa," (way of sorrow), the grace with which Christ accepted the cup he asked to be removed, the Holy Indifference with which Christ persevered the mocking of those who "knew not what they were doing," and the confidence with which Christ absorbed the world's displaced hostility on the cross all speak of One who knew who he was, to whom he belonged, and the purpose of his life.

John Phillip Newell, poet, teacher, and author who is known for his work in Celtic Spirituality, describes Jesus' countenance in his book A New Harmony:

Julian of Norwich, in one of her visions of Jesus, realizes that he is handsome, and the "handsome mixture" that she notes in him is "partly sorrow" and "partly joy." His face speaks of a knowledge of life's delight and a knowledge of life's pain. It is not a face that is naïve to the world's sufferings or to the personal experience of sorrow. Nor is it a face that is so overwhelmed by sorrow that it loses its openness and wonder. To be truly handsome, to be truly beautiful, is to reflect in one's countenance, both life's glory and life's pain. It is not simply a sweet face, a pretty smile. It is a soul that has experienced the heights and the depths of human life.

On that first Easter morning, Mary, Peter and the other disciple all longed for the countenance of their beloved friend and mentor. According to John, following the discovery of the empty tomb, the disciples return to their homes, perhaps looking for a private space in which to shed their tears of loss, wonder and bewilderment. But Mary stood outside the tomb, weeping. John is the only Gospel in which Mary weeps at the tomb. There is something powerful and personal about weeping.

Again, John Phillip Newell, provides insight into the gift of tears, reflecting on a sixth century spiritual practice from the Island of Iona:

One of the rules St. Columba gave to his monastic community was to pray "until thy tears come." Prayer is about getting in touch with the deepest dimension of our being. It is "the moistness of the soul," that leads us "to shed tears." And when we see through tears, we see differently. We see the world as if washed by a sea rain…we see that the hard edges of life

have become blurred. Even though brokenness may have caused our tears, when we weep, we are close to life's oneness.

John Phillip Newell goes on to share an experience he had as a young man visiting Dublin, Ireland. One evening he wandered past St. Patrick's Cathedral and noticed that a performance of Handel's Messiah was about to begin. St. Patrick's choir had in fact been the first to sing Handel's new oratorio in 1747. John Phillip Newell bought a ticket and entered the cathedral. The overture was already under way as he squeezed past some elegantly dressed couples in his old rain-soaked coat to find his seat in the pew. When the opening words from Isaiah 40 were song "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," he began to weep, unexpectedly. Tears streamed down his face.

As we listen to Mary weep at the tomb, we remember the One for whom she weeps, we hear his tender voice call her name and the words of comfort he spoke to his followers before he died ring in our ears: *So you have pain and sorrow now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. (John 16)*

This is the good news of Easter, my friends. No one can take away our joy because we have a God who not only joined us in our humanity, we have a God who conquered death by dying on a cross. Today, we commemorate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we proclaim with Christians around the world that death is not the last word and that the love of God could not be contained in the tomb. Today we find life in death at the place where joy and sorrow meet! Hallelujah! Amen.

On this Day of Resurrection as we go forth from the place where joy and sorrow meet, have courage….

And may the Risen Christ bless you and keep you.
May Christ's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May the beautiful countenance of Christ be upon you and grant you peace.
Now and forevermore. Amen.