

**Sunday March 31, 2024**

**First Lesson: Matthew 11:28–30**

**GOSPEL READING: John 20: 1–3, 11–18**

**Sermon Series: Enduring Resurrection**

**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

**Good morning Beloved Community!**

- **Today we are concluding our Lenten sermon series Enduring.**
- **Every week leading up until Resurrection Sunday in which has alas arrived, our Lenten journey has been a time of engaging a new spiritual growth opportunity to talk about and learn from so that on this great Resurrection Sunday, we will be able to look over our time together and celebrate the liberation that has come as a result of us doing this vital work together.**
- **The topic we are invited to endure this week is the topic of Resurrection.**
- **It may be helpful for us to first off define what we mean by resurrection.**

- In the Methodist tradition, **resurrection is the cornerstone of our Christian faith and hope.**
- It is rooted in the teachings of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, where the understanding of resurrection encompasses both spiritual and practical dimensions.
- At its core, Methodism emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the central event in human history.
- **It is in Jesus** that we affirm the belief that through Christ's resurrection, humanity is offered the promise of eternal life and redemption from sin.
- Our Methodist theology teaches us that Jesus' victory over death not only demonstrates God's power over the forces of darkness but also serves as a source of inspiration and empowerment for believers.
- So what does any of this mean in today's time?
- Suppose I were to define resurrection from a spiritual and relational aspect. **In that case**, it is the eternal promise of renewal and transformation, that transcends the bounds of mortality and embraces the timeless essence of hope.

- Resurrection, by this understanding, declares triumph of the human spirit over adversity, **inviting us to rise from the ashes of our past, revitalized and reborn.**
- Furthermore, why I am naming resurrection to be something that we must endure, is because **it is difficult to rise from the ashes** of our past isn't it?
- **It is difficult for us to rise from the ashes** of our setbacks, failures, challenges, and grief.
- **It is difficult for us to rise from the ashes** of sickness and surgeries and await more uncertain news.
- **It is difficult for us to rise from the ashes** of economic hardships, financial losses, strained and estranged relationships, and whatever other life struggle this sermon may not have directly named, but in keeping my ears to the pulse of this community and the pulse of the overall world—I **am confident that I am scraping the surface of someone's story this morning.**

- Furthermore, this is the essence of what I believe is going on with Mary Magdalene in our gospel this morning—We are witnessing a woman trying to **rise from her own ashes** of immense grief, frustration, panic, exhaustion and perhaps even anger.
- Our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life class, which meets every Wednesday at 5:45 to talk about the sermon and weigh in on the upcoming scriptures, are the ones who identified these potential emotions within Mary as she discovered that the tomb of Jesus was empty.
- From our class, **some were struck** by the first sentence of our gospel that indicates that Mary came to the tomb while it was still dark, which could signal to the reader that she had no rest from the gruesome crucifixion scene we just relived on Good Friday; leaving Mary exhausted.
- **Some were struck** by the horror Mary must have experienced as she frantically searched for answers once she realized the tomb was empty.

- Her mind was probably racing with questions: Where have they taken him? What has happened to his body?—leading Mary to a headspace of **panic, frustration, possibly even anger**—for how much more violence and corruption would Jesus have to keep enduring? They had already killed him; he at least deserved to have a proper burial!
- We all as a class agreed that the most prominent emotion Mary must have been experiencing on that morning was **grief**;
- I am referring to an earth-shattering profound grief where her tears produced audible wailing, groaning, and utterances that only the angels on the scene could understand.
- **They were utterances** that only our God can understand.
- It was a profound grief that we are invited to witness carefully and closely because it provides the pathway for **how we are all to rise from the ashes** of our own life struggles.

- For how we get to this place of resurrection is by **working through our ashes—**
- **Mary worked through her ashes—**and allowed herself to fully experience all of the emotions that came with her grief.
- **Mary worked through her ashes** by not closing herself off from others while going through this process—
- You see, Church, it is the human temptation to close off and isolate ourselves **when we are working through our ashes**, simply because we don't want others to see us in such a vulnerable position!
- However, we see it was because **Mary worked through her ashes in a community with other people going through a similar process** that eventually led her from a place of deep despair to a divine intervention in which she was fully able to encounter Jesus.
- **Stephen and I had the privilege of eating dinner with my Mother in Love at the Legacy this past Tuesday.**

- After our dinner together, we watched the documentary of a courageous woman **who worked through her ashes** by designing the world's first teddy bear.
- Margarete Steiff, the founder of the world-renowned Steiff company known for its high-quality teddy bears and other plush toys, faced numerous challenges throughout her life.
- She contracted polio as a child, which left her paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair.
- She had limited use of one of her arms but despite her physical limitations, Margarete Steiff possessed an entrepreneurial spirit.
- In the late 19th century, Margarete Steiff designed and created what would become the iconic teddy bear.
- She learned to sew and began making clothing and soft toys, initially as a hobby.
- Inspired by a newspaper article about the American President Theodore Roosevelt sparing the life of a

bear during a hunting trip, she crafted a bear toy and named it "Teddy's Bear." This creation marked the beginning of the Steiff company's legacy.

- In summary, Margarete Steiff **worked through and rose from her own ashes** through her determination, creativity, and resilience.
- Despite facing significant challenges, including disability and initial setbacks in her business, she persevered, ultimately achieving great success and leaving behind a lasting legacy.
- I was moved by Margarete's story so much that I went online to purchase one of the Steiff bears that I plan to give to my mother-in-love today—to thank her for our time together.
- One of our students expressed on Wednesday night in light of our discussion....he said “**Resurrection is hard!**”
- The biggest takeaway that I feel led to proclaim is that Resurrection is hard because it starts with our ashes—
- **Ashes that have** to be purified...



- **Ashes that have** to be sanctified...
- **Ashes that involve** sacrifice and surrendering the ego or worldly attachments;
- **Ashes that represent** a process of transformation and renewal;
- **Ashes that connect us** to a divine presence, a burning bush engulfed with flames, but wait it is not consumed!
- **From dust we came, from dust we shall return, but oh, I am so glad that is not how our story ends!**
- In the tapestry of existence, this transient vessel will transcend into eternal splendor;
- And this mortal frame will be enrobed in imperishable glory!
- Then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen and Hallelujah!