

# “Resuscitation or Resurrection!”

---

April 5, 2026

Steve Ramer

## **Scripture: John 20:1-20**

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’s 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 he 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? Whom are you looking for?” 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 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.

## Sermon

We began our Lenten journey seven Sundays ago and during this time we have, as our theme indicates, been “Dwelling in Dissonance.” We have both encountered and tried to sit, uncomfortably at times, with many contradictions, contrasts, and with discordant tunes and dissonant themes. It was not meant to be an easy journey at the start but as we know, most journeys that lead to transformation usually aren’t.

We began seven weeks ago with the story of Lazarus. If you recall, Lazarus became ill, and died prior to Jesus’ arrival in Bethany, at the home he shared with Mary and Martha. The story began tragically with sickness and death but in the end Lazarus did walk out of his tomb, very much alive. In that process we also encountered the immense grief that typically occurs with the death of a loved one. His sisters’ grief was real and so powerful that it even overwhelmed Jesus to the point that he shed tears of his own.

But I think that it is very important to point out that, in the end, Lazarus was not resurrected from the dead but resuscitated. A very important distinction that especially needs to be made on this day in which we celebrate resurrection!

In his book *The Holy Longing*, theologian Ronald Rolheiser describes the difference between resuscitated life and resurrected life this way, “Resuscitated life is when one is restored to one’s former life and health, as is the case with someone who has been clinically dead and is brought back to life. Resurrected life is not this. It is not a restoration of one’s old life but the reception of a radically new life.”

Resuscitated life is like waking up from hibernation where bears and other critters who hibernate through the long cold winter, begin to awaken again as the days get longer and warmer. Resurrected life on the other hand is a metamorphosis or the miraculous process that turns a pudgy caterpillar into a delicate butterfly.

Think for a moment about the implications then for us of this distinction. Well for me, this distinction between resuscitation and resurrection totally turns upside down that story about Lazarus. In the middle of the story there is an exchange between Jesus and Martha, where, “Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Now the resuscitation of Lazarus was a very big deal especially for those who loved him dearly. Their pain was real - it truly hurt and in the depth of their grief they were most likely quite thrilled to have Lazarus returned to life. But in his claim to be “the resurrection and the life” Jesus was pointing to an even greater and more powerful possibility.

The power of Easter, the superlative power of resurrection is the possibility now of unlimited transformation for ourselves and for our world. And when we allow ourselves to really see, if we are open to it, we then do see resurrections happening all around us in our world. Now of course we also observe, tragically, a whole lot of folks walking around seemingly alive but not at all truly living and even avoiding that life altering transformative power.

One benefit of getting older is that you have had more time to witness resurrections within yourself and around you in the world. A downside is that sometimes you sort of “get used to it,” and stop keeping your eyes and antennas on the alert. Maybe we begin to think to ourselves, “We’ve changed so much that nothing much then needs to change.”

But here in this little church we have witnessed, first hand, the immense power of transformation! We have seen and we have heard of many who have risen from the dead, transformed lives of those walking dead from addiction, of those once paralyzed with fear and who were raised from hopelessness to new lives energized with a new future. We have seen the power of transformed lives, of those who are breaking the generational chains of abuse and trauma, as they now begin new lives and families of their own. But we who choose to walk alongside are also changed. For all of us this process has been slow and difficult at times, fraught with many false starts and serious setbacks.

But if you have ever had the opportunity to watch a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis, you know just how much that too can be a real struggle.

Our scene this morning seems quite scattered and filled with confusion. People are both seeing and unable to see, some are able to see but not comprehend. Folks are running wildly and rummaging around alone in the dark. A sense of urgency is palpable.

In the “dark,” Mary notices the stone rolled away, but she does not go in. Two of the disciples sprint to the tomb, feeling the desperate need to “see for themselves” what has just happened. They notice many details of the scene, but did they also totally miss those angelic forms that were so clear to Mary when she looked in? We all know that sometimes we only manage to see what we want to see. Mary too is confused as she hears the voice of Jesus but then fails to recognize him.

“Whom are you looking for?” becomes the question for the ages! A question that should stop us all in our tracks each time we hear it. Have we found what we are looking for? What is it we are intently searching after? Does what we find motivate us to keep searching?

Wendell Berry, I'm told, closes his poem *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, with two words, "Practice resurrection." Pretty definitive instructions I would say. But just like John's text, it leaves us without resolution or completion. The story we call Easter is not done, we too must help complete it.

So, what dissonances do you feel between this story and your current lived experience? How might you practice resurrection this Easter season? How do we continue to live out the dissonance of our convictions that God desires true conversions and ultimate transformations in a world seemingly bent on just creating more of the same: more wealth, more death, more wars, more hatred, more poverty, and more isolation?

Currently our building is quiet, dark and a bit solemn inside. Perhaps not unlike a tomb? But it also contains many memories of much life of times filled with the laughter of children, of Christmas pageants and Easter egg hunts, of the greetings of new friends, and of times saying good-bye to old friends. It has held weddings, baptisms, funerals, and anniversary celebrations. So much life!

But it now lies empty contaminated and condemned with the stain of something that is the source of so much death and pain. It will never rise again to be the same place that it was. But in the end, we also know that church is also a community. True community is created by real people who struggle together. People are the ones, then, who are resurrected, we are the ones who have this opportunity to walk out of the silent darkness, not merely alive but as resurrected and radically transformed people.

Our church building may soon be torn down, but the real church that met there will rise again. It too can be resurrected! It will not be the same but this is how we must, "practice resurrection!" It is Easter that defines us as Christians, but true resurrection is not, cannot be limited to one day. True resurrection, true transformation and change, must be practiced again and again, each and every day!