

**“Looking for Jesus”**  
**March 31, 2013—Easter Sunday**  
CCUMC  
Melanie Dobson Hughes

**Looking for Easter Eggs**

After worship today, our younger children will go on an Easter Egg hunt on the church grounds. The egg has since ancient times represented fertility (for obvious reasons). For Christians, the eggshell itself represents the tomb. The yolk, or embryo inside, is a sign of life. The little chick poking through the darkness and hopping out into light depicts the resurrection. For our children today, no chicks will be trying to peck through the egg. Instead, the eggs they find will hold a chocolate treat. I’m all for seeing chocolate inside the egg as a sign of the resurrection, too! (anyone with me on that? I would say particularly dark chocolate represents new life for me.) Anyway, the children go on a hunt expecting to find eggs, these signs of the resurrection, right? If they don’t look, and don’t find, they’ll feel greatly disappointed and cheated—especially cheated of the chocolates planted by the United Methodist Women in the eggs.

**Looking for Jesus**

In our scripture story today, several women went on a hunt, looking for the body of a dearly beloved. They came in the darkness of the early dawn with anointing oils and spices to prepare the body

for burial, since they couldn't do such work on the Jewish Sabbath day. They looked. These women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, and several others, stepped into the dank darkness of a cave tomb. They braced their spirits for finding a corpse. Instead, they find nothing. Nothing. The scripture says they were "perplexed." The Greek word is *diaperao*. It means to be "utterly at a loss, to be in doubt." These women felt cheated, scared, utterly at a loss.

The gospel of Luke is the only account of the resurrection that depicts the women forlorn, alone, huddling in the darkness of a tomb. Since the resurrection account often blends into one story in our memory, it's helpful to parse out Luke's gospel's distinctive accent here. Each gospel tells the story of the discovery of the empty tomb with its own unique features.<sup>1</sup> In Mark, the oldest gospel and source for the others, the women arrive, and the stone is rolled away already—just like in Luke. When the women step inside the tomb, though, they immediately see a dazzling young man in white. They were terrified by this, but at least they didn't have to grope about in the dark for a corpse. The angel comforts them, and tells them "Don't be alarmed. He has been raised; he is not here." In the gospel of Matthew, the women endure an earthquake, and an angel descends from the sky and rolls back the tombstone right in front of them. The

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<sup>1</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke" *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 468.

angel also comforts them, and says, "Don't be afraid. He has been raised from the dead and he is going ahead of you to Galilee." The women hardly even glimpse inside the tomb in Matthew. In the gospel of John only Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, so it's good the stone is already rolled away for her when she gets there. She runs and gets two other disciples, and must have run back with them, too, to the tomb. Simon Peter and the other disciple are the ones to go inside the tomb. Mary, meanwhile, stands outside weeping. She leans in and looks, and sees two angels, who tell her, "woman, stop crying." (men—just a hint—this doesn't work with women. They just cry more.) Jesus himself appears to her, and she mistakes him for the gardener. In John, Mary gets to see Jesus for herself.

Then we have Luke. Only in Luke do the women go in the tomb, and stand there huddling in the grief-filled darkness. Only in Luke do the women look and not find anything at first. Angels appear to them later as well, and scare them. Yet even these angels don't offer words of comfort to the women. They have no warm pastoral words like, "Don't be afraid." They give almost a reprimand to the women. (point finger) "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the son of Man must be crucified and the third day rise again. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is risen," the angels say. Their tone is starker and colder in Luke.

Why? Why does Luke depict the women in utter darkness, looking for Jesus that is not there? Why does Luke not even have comforting angels with cherub cheeks and fluttering wings, but these reprimanding men? Perhaps because this isn't the first time in Luke that Jesus has gone missing. Only Luke tells the story of Jesus as a boy learning in the temple, while his parents have no idea where he is for three days. Jesus can be hard to find in this gospel. Perhaps, too, because in Luke, the disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection have a hard time finding Jesus—they don't see him in their roadside companion. Only Luke has this Emmaus story.

The women and the other male disciples knew Jesus. They were his inner circle. Jesus told them in the gospel of Luke that he would be betrayed, crucified and raised. The women, we are told in chapter 23, witnessed both the crucifixion and the burial. If anyone would have known where to find Jesus, the women and the other disciples should have known. Yet, they don't. They stand, feeling utterly lost and cheated, in a tomb on Easter morn. Jesus can be hard to find.

### **Our Own Looking for Jesus**

Perhaps some of you can identify with a Jesus who is hard to find. Perhaps you've come here this Easter morn to try to find Jesus, to try to find a little holiness in the darkness. Perhaps you stand inside a tomb of some sort, wondering where in the world God is in

this conflict, or in this job loss, or in this illness, or in this heartbreak. Or in this depression. Perhaps you feel *diaperao*--- cheated, scared, utterly at a loss.

Lauren Winner, in her recent book *Still: Notes on a Mid-faith Crisis*, writes about looking for a Jesus who is hard to find. She quotes a rabbi who says, “all throughout the Bible we find people looking for God, and not finding God, because God doesn’t often conform to our expectations. God is somewhere other than we think to look.”<sup>2</sup> (repeat some) God was obviously somewhere than where those women that Easter morn thought to look. God wasn’t in a tomb; God was out having a leisurely stroll along the road to Emmaus, hungry for some good bread.

Perhaps God is somewhere other than where we’ve thought to look, somewhere beyond our expectations. Maybe you thought God was going to show up in a cure for your cancer, or in a resolution to a conflict, or in a new job—or at least in your prayers. Maybe you thought God would show up in your deepest suffering, and God’s not there in the tomb with you. Instead, God shows up in a loving card from a friend, or hug from a child, or who knows, in super quality dark chocolate—after all the psalmist says “Taste and see that the Lord is

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<sup>2</sup> Lauren Winner, *Still*, 114.

sweet.” Jesus isn’t hanging out with us dead in a tomb while we ourselves are scared to death of life. He is not here; he has risen.

We can take comfort that it may take us a good while to find Jesus. Even the disciples had a hard time figuring out where to find Jesus. It may take a while for us to figure out that Jesus is walking beside us on a road we could have never anticipated traveling. It may take us three days, or three months, or three years, to realize we’ve completely lost Jesus, and we need to go back to the temple, back to a congregation to find him again. It may take us just a moment, just a stillness, to turn inward, and realize that God has been dwelling there all along. It may take some angels who aren’t plumb, chubby, and cherub-like to remind us, maybe in not the most kind of voice, “why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here; he is risen.” Amen

**Let us pray:**

God of the resurrection, we have heard the good news, how on the third day Christ rose again. Still we look for the living among the dead. You rolled the stone away, you sent messengers to proclaim the gospel, you are faithful to your promises. Still we look for the living among the dead. Show, us, O God, how to find you in unexpected places. Turn us from whatever tomb in which we stand to find Jesus, to find hope, to live into resurrection---even if it takes us a moment, or three days, or three years to really smell the Easter lilies. Let us take now a moment of silent prayer for us to open our hearts, to perhaps find that God is there. . . .

From darkness and despair, from utter loss and disappointment, we find hope and joy. Christ is risen. In the spirit of that resurrection we pray that there may be joy in Jerusalem, and peace among all nations.

We pray that all sounds of weeping and cries of distress may turn to shouts of joy and laughter. We pray that infants may grow and thrive, and that the old can dance like children. May grief and loss give way to glimmers of hope. We pray that every person might have a home. May that the wolf and lamb may some day live in peace, and may human beings stop hurting and destroying each other. Show us, O God, the holy mountain you have prepared, the new heaven and new earth you have promised, so that we may be glad and rejoice in your presence forever, through Jesus Christ. Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed. Amen.

#### Prayer after communion

You have given yourself to us , Lord.  
Now we give ourselves for others.  
You have raised us with Christ, and made us a new people.  
As people of the resurrection, we will serve you with joy.  
Your glory has filled our hearts.  
Help us to glorify you in all things. Amen.