

**Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes**  
**March 31, 2024**  
**Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer**

Sermon Text for Easter 1: John 20:1-9  
Title: “John’s Despair” / Series: “Things He Healed”  
Schumann Hall Art Exhibit: “Stations of the Resurrection”

Core Observations of the Texts

- 1. Darkness:** The theme of darkness that opens John chapter 20 taps into one of the Gospel of John’s deepest metaphors (see, for example, John 1:5-9 as the baseline text in this regard). For John’s Gospel, “darkness” points to the despair of unbelief in which the future is closed. There is an external darkness (when a particular situation seems closed off to goodness) and an internal darkness (when a person enters the train of thought that says, “after this moment, nothing good can happen to me again”). It was noted in the sermon that John and Peter respond to the external darkness by closing themselves off from God. In other words, the darkness outside comes into their hearts (see v10 and v19). By contrast, when Mary Magdalene sees that external darkness, she somehow has courage and light within herself to walk out into it and face it (see v1). The central claim of this text is that resurrection goes to work in the darkness of human despair!
- 2. Mary leaders:** The three actions of Mary in this story become a patter that John and Peter follow: she exits her house into the darkness (v1), she runs (v2), and she witnesses the empty tomb (v1). Similarly, John and Peter will exit their hour into the darkness (v3), run (v4) and witness the empty tomb (v5).
- 3. A community for searchers:** The bible passage this week focused on the movement out of despair. Twice in this short story, John needs a friend to invite him out of despair and into a searching frame of heart – Mary invites him out of the house (v2), and Peter invites John into the tomb to examine the evidence more carefully (v5-6). The emphatic point is that nobody can search for Jesus alone. The local church is to be that community of friends who invites people out of despair and into a search.

Questions to Ponder

- 1. Resurrection:** What is the difference between resuscitation and resurrection? Why do you think so few Americans can point to an experience of the resurrection in their daily, ordinary lives? The sermon claimed that most Christians are amazed by the resurrection but few have joy in it – how about you?
- 2. A church for searchers:** How might First Protestant become a church where it people are tugged out of despair into searching? How can you, as a member of First Protestant, point searchers towards the evidence of the resurrection?
- 3. Depression:** Pastor Andrew shared a personal story of experiencing a few months of depression after an illness in college. Often there is a stigma on mental illness in the church. How does a passage like this inform a more loving approach to mental illness?

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