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Title: Asking Jesus: Risen!

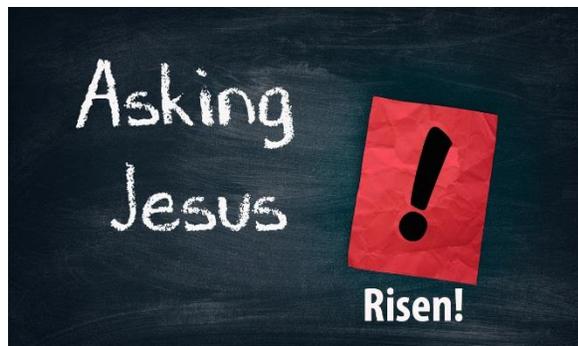
Date: April 16, 2017

Preaching: Senior Associate Minister Ryan Hazen

Scripture: [John 20:1-10](#)

Text: [John 20:11-18](#)

E-mail: [Ryan Hazen](#)



Some of you may be familiar with Tony Campolo's classic sermon, "It's Friday, but Sunday's Coming." It was based on a sermon Tony once heard his pastor preach on Good Friday. This pastor began his message by quietly saying, "It's Friday and my Jesus is hanging dead on a tree. But it's Friday, and Sunday's coming."

With a little encouragement the preacher grew a little louder. "It's Friday, and Mary's crying her eyes out and the disciples are scattered like sheep without a

shepherd. But it's Friday, and Sunday's coming."

And he keeps working that one phrase over and over again. "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming. It's Friday, but Sunday's coming. It's Friday, but Sunday's coming" until he reaches the pinnacle of that great message. And he shouts out, "It's Friday!" and the whole congregation stands up and with one voice shouts back, "But Sunday's coming!"¹

Well, friends, it is my privilege to stand before you this Easter Sunday 2017 and to declare to you, Sunday is here! Easter Sunday is here! Our greatest fears have been proved groundless and our greatest hopes have been realized.

It's Easter. At Geist Christian Church beginning with Ash Wednesday on March 1, we've been asking questions – or perhaps more accurately, we've been hearing Jesus ask questions. All during the season of Lent, we've had a question mark here where this exclamation point stands this morning. We selected nine questions that forced us to reflect on some of the biggest questions of the Christian life. It has been a wonderful way to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, to the cross and to his resurrection today. Narrowing it down to just nine questions was harder than you might think. If you've been here for some of the season, you know that Jesus asks a lot of questions in scripture. In almost every situation, Jesus is asking questions and even asks questions to give answers to questions that people ask him.

"Most people go to the gospels to see what Jesus will say, not to see what Jesus will ask."² But in the four gospels, Jesus asks 307 different questions. By contrast, he is only asked 183 questions. That means that for every question he is asked, he responds with 1.67 questions. Against what we might think, Jesus answers very few of the questions he is asked.³ Jesus is not the ultimate Answer Man— he's more like the Great Questioner. Throughout this season, we've determined that Jesus should be nicknamed, "Asking Jesus."

I'm not suggesting that Jesus asked questions because he didn't know the answer. Rather, I believe He asked questions because he cared. He asked questions because questions teach. He asked questions

because he wants his followers to think. Questions inspire people to discover something new. They create intimacy because of the dialog that happens around the question. Questions create growth. Open ended questions from Jesus can cause us to go deeper spiritually than we ever could being spoon-fed an answer.

A few years ago, there was a popular children's Sunday school curriculum called Worship & Wonder. Each session of Worship & Wonder ends with a time of reflection on the Bible story the children had just heard and learned. It is called the "wondering time." The children are invited to wonder about any aspect of the story that would pop into their head. "I wonder if it was dusty on that road?" – "I wonder how it felt to be made well after being sick so long?" – "I wonder if Jesus was ever scared?" "I wonder what Mary thought when she couldn't find Jesus in the tomb?" After each child's question, the leader was taught to respond with, "I wonder that too."

Therapists and counselors know that people make better progress if they can discover answers through their own discovery. That discovery happens through directed, pointed questions. Today's Easter scripture from the Gospel of John is no different. Jesus can today still be nicknamed "Asking Jesus." After making her way to the tomb while it was still dark on that first day of the week, Mary Magdalene sees the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb had been removed. She summons help in the persons of Peter and presumably John and they come and investigate. Finding only folded linen wrappings but no Jesus, they return to their home leaving the grieving Mary alone again at the tomb.

Other gospels have Mary and others bringing spices to anoint the body but John does not add this detail and has Mary alone at the tomb. Do we know this woman, this Mary? This story is so much richer if we understand a bit about this Mary. It's important because we might see some Mary in us. We know that her name was Mary, a common name at the time – Jesus' mother was also Mary. This Mary was from the town of Magdala, a fishing town on the Sea of Galilee that had a reputation for not-so clean living. We know from the gospels of Mark and Luke that Mary of Magdala had been freed by Jesus from seven demons – that's Bible speak for saying she had some serious problems.

None of the gospel writers disclose what these demons were but even today, we still understand "demons." We all have them to some extent. They are the things that eat at us, they are the things that wake us up at night, the things that creep into our psyche until we are fully distracted by them. It can be self-doubt, the fear of failure, the worry that creeps in when you worry about how good you are – as a parent, as a spouse, as an employee, as a person.

We don't know what Mary's demons were but we do know the demons were real. They are the stuff of life – in ourselves and in those we know and love. But this is what else we know about Mary Magdalene – we know that Jesus, by word or by healing touch, had somehow made her new. Through this man Jesus, God had changed Mary's life. As far as Jesus was concerned, her past was past, her demons were gone – he no longer could see them in her. Mary Magdalene was someone whom Jesus had called by name before. It's why she went to the tomb that morning.

That's the Mary who we find looking in the tomb THAT morning – that's the Mary who we find looking in the tomb THIS morning. As she looks in, she sees two angels sitting at the head and foot of the burial ledge. They have a question as well – the same one that Jesus will ask momentarily – "Woman, why are you weeping?" She explains that she does not know the whereabouts of Jesus' body. Then, the same question from Jesus, whom she does not yet recognize and believes to be the gardener. In addition to

“Woman, why are you weeping?” he adds, “Whom are you looking for?” A hint of frustration is present as she just wants to know where he is so she can care for his body.

Why doesn't Mary recognize Jesus? Is it still too dark? Given that she's now had time to find the tomb open, run and tell friends, have them come and investigate and have them leave, this seems unlikely. Had Jesus changed in appearance? This may be true as we know that there are other appearances of the risen Christ that come later when he is not recognized. Were her tears so great that they clouded her vision? This can be true. You know that when you cry and cry and cry, your tears distort your vision.

I have one other theory that is less practical and more spiritual but it's one I hope you'll understand and carry with you as you encounter life's circumstances and obstacles that make you cry. What if Mary was facing the wrong direction?⁴ Not just with her eyes but with her mind and heart as well.

Mary has come to the tomb, having borne witness to her beloved savior's death. She is deep in the throes of a world stuck in Friday's sorrow. She comes seeking a dead body. Bent down and discouraged, she has come to the place where her hopes and dreams have come to an end. And then *these strangers* are asking WHY she weeps? Seriously? Why do I weep? I thought I had found THE answer, but now, suddenly, it's all a question mark again. Life was hopeful and joyful and now....What? Will Friday's sadness, defeat and despair ever end? Will I ever know joy? Dear Jesus, I'm defeated and sad and scared and now I can't even find your body. What am I to do? Where am I to go? How did all that was so good turn out so bad? Why, dear Jesus? Why? Mary comes to the tomb defeated, with thoughts that must have screamed out questions of despair. Is it any wonder then? Is it any wonder that she doesn't see Jesus – recognize Jesus?

Mary! Jesus speaks her name tenderly but with an exclamation. Scripture adds an exclamation point. Jesus calling her by name exclaims the joy of the reunion. His exclamation of Mary's spoken name shatters her sadness, lifts up her head, turns her from her swirling questions of Friday to that first Easter morning. Mary! The risen Christ names her and her eyes are opened. Her questions are answered. Rabbouni! (with an exclamation point), she replies in recognition. In this moment, Mary's Friday is defeated and Sunday has come. Her master is RISEN!, with an exclamation point, and the joy of the moment answers all of her questions. Death is defeated! Christ is risen! Sunday has come!

This, then, is the invitation of Easter. Some of us come like Mary, defeated, burdened and full of questions, facing the wrong direction, unable to see anything but our past. Some of us come with a ready Alleluia in our hearts and on our lips. Together, in this community, all are met by the risen Christ. All are known. All are loved. We even like to call you by name. On this Easter morning, I challenge you to listen for the risen Christ as he calls you by name. He doesn't care about what's behind you, but he cares deeply about what's ahead of you. On this Sunday morning, turn forward and rise with him.

Recognize the risen Christ. Friday has been defeated. Sunday has come. Christ the Lord is Risen today! Alleluia! Alleluia! Those are declarations worthy of exclamation points!

1 Campolo, Tony. Retelling of this story from website www.redletterchristians.org. April 18, 2014.

2 Douglas Estes, *The Questions in Meyer*, BRILL publishing, 2012, pg 2.

³ Copenhaver, Martin B. *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Kindle Locations 185-188). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴ This idea of wrong direction found in sermon, "Easter Question," by Maxie Dunnam found in at www.sermons.com.

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