

**John 20: 1-18 “Lamb of God” Sunrise Service April 20, 2025 Rev. Janet Chapman**

**It was the season where the lambs of Passover were slaughtered that the Lamb of God was murdered. Sheep scattered that fateful day and hid in darkness weeping. They believed it was over; Jesus himself had said it from the cross hadn't he? Those dreadful words, “It is finished.” They felt finished as well. For three days they huddled together, their hearts trembling, their faces swollen from tears, fear gripping them at the thought of never seeing Jesus again. It was in the early morning on that third day that Mary Magdalene walked through the darkness to the tomb and found the stone rolled away. She ran and found Peter and that other disciple whom Jesus loved. “They have taken Jesus out of the tomb,” she said, “and we don't know where to find him.” Peter came into the tomb and saw the linens lying there, the head linen rolled up by itself. Then the other disciple came into the tomb and he saw and he believed. He saw and he believed. In this past season of Lent, we have sought to see Jesus in our wilderness journeys, to believe in God's ability to bring us back from the brink of devastation. Do we see? Do we believe? Who do we say that he is?**

**Ann Weems writes, “He is the one who gathers the children to himself. He is the one who speaks with women, even foreign women, even Gentile women, even women of the streets. He is the one who sits down with tax collectors. He is the one who eats with sinners. He is the one who touches lepers. He is the One, period. The disciples went home from that empty tomb, but not Mary, no, not Mary. She stayed, she wept, she bent to look into the tomb and this time she saw two angels, one at the foot where Jesus had lain and one at the head. “Woman,” they asked, “why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him. I do not know where he is!” The same words his mother Mary must have used when she realized the young Jesus wasn't with the caravan traveling back home from another Passover visit to Jerusalem. “I don't know where he is,” she pleaded with Joseph, “my firstborn is missing!” Once found, Jesus responds, “Did you not know I would be about my Father's business?” Always about his Father's business, in life as in death.**

An unexpected stranger in the garden asks Mary, “Why are you crying... Who are you looking for?” “Sir,” she responds, “Tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. I will do what must be done.” All Jesus has to say is one simple word, “Mary.... Oh Mary, do you not know me?” “Rabboni” she responds. Yes, she knew him, she knew Jesus. She ran to tell the others: “I have seen Jesus.” And there it is... what the world has been searching for, that which we have waited for, that which we have worked for. Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Mary knew he isn’t some goody-goody god; he is Justice, he is Mercy, he is Humility, he is Love. And Mary saw him, Mary knew him, Mary believed him. But we are not Mary and we aren’t at the tomb near Golgatha, thus seeing and believing must come differently for us. Experiencing Easter must come from you and I greeting each other this day and sharing stories of life in the year 2025, stories of life which has overcome death, of hope which has overcome despair, of new chances which have transformed broken lives into healed ones.

We’ll call him James and he attended Duke University when Rev. Will Willimon got to know him. James wasn’t unlike many young adults in our Redding community. He had a rough upbringing, his parents were alcoholics, he experimented with meth and crack, and got arrested trying selling drugs to some friends. He was institutionalized in “juvie,” but broke out, hitchhiked to Chicago, and lived on the streets selling his body for drugs. One night, he took a businessman’s wallet and went on a spending spree with his credit cards until the cops caught up with him and he was sent to jail for 3 years. Will listened intently and responded, “Yeah that is pretty rough alright.” “I told you I was bad,” James responded. “Don’t know if you have ever been in a prison like that, but it was hell. I hit rock bottom. This older prisoner took me under his wing, and would read the Bible to me at night before lockdown. He was the worst reader. Took him forever to get through a chapter. I grew up Catholic but didn’t know anything about the Bible. So, one night he was reading from the Gospel of Luke, I think it was that section about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. And it was just like Jesus himself walked into that cell and grabbed me, slammed me against the

wall, and said to me, ‘I got plans for you. Now cut this crap out!’” Willimon interjected, “Wow, we don’t hear stories like yours very often.” James continued, “So, I got my high school degree, got out of jail, went to Michigan State and made straight A’s, but always wanted to go to Duke, so I transferred and am doing great.” “That’s amazing,” said Will. “Here’s my point,” James said, “You’re a preacher, right? And I bet you preachers are always looking around for good stories to use for sermons. This Sunday is Easter and it can’t be easy to come up with something new about resurrection. But you can tell my story because I am your proof that Easter is true.”

Easter comes and we see shrouds that have covered lives in darkness being destroyed, being changed for the better – this is Easter at its best. We experience Easter when we dare to follow the Risen Christ into broken families, into drug hang-outs, into streets of prostitutes, and the least likely places for the Divine to show up. We no longer look for the Risen Christ among the dead, but we come to believe in our hearts that the people of this world will someday learn to love one another, really love one another. If we believe, we know that is not a naïve hope, but God’s promise. Death will not have the final victory for we shall live in him who lives in us. On this Easter morning and on every morning, let us join with all creation to sing Alleluia, and then with Mary, let us run to tell the others, we have seen our Lord! Amen.