

# Sermons at Christ Church

## *Be One Body In Christ, Belonging to Each Other.*

Easter Sunday  
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

***O come! in this sweet morning hour. Feed me with food divine; And fill with all Thy love and power This worthless heart of mine.***

Easter is about victory, and don't we all appreciate little victories here and there. Easter is about the victory lap, and often times it is about that one word that sets in motion that victory you have been praying for and working for. A few days ago I shared the story of Samuel Herring. The past couple of years have been very difficult for him. He wrote an article about his struggles and his desire to be well, live life and spend time with his family. But his medical challenges are such that he can't live the way he wants to live. Like Mary, he is looking into the darkness of an empty tomb. I wonder how he makes it through the day. He needs an organ donor. He's been staring at the floor and literally looking at his phone, awaiting for that one call, that one word which would give him his victory lap.

Upon reading his article, his story felt like that of Mary Magdalene who has been looking deep into the darkness of the empty tomb. She's been looking into the tomb because it is the closest that she can get to the man she called Rabbi. She had been with this Rabbi who called her, restored her and offered her a new life of purpose and meaning. Mary used to live on the margins of society, she was one who was used and abused by men both great and small. And then she chanced upon a man who invited her to look at life in a different way. This was the man who asked her Easter's question, do you want to see the glory of God or you don't? And when she answered that she wanted to see the glory of God, she realized that her life was worth more than she could ever bargain for. And for that reason, she followed him.

She's followed up until this moment. It's been three days since they took her new song away from her. She cannot sing. She's cried more than she had ever cried in her life. Behind her lies the attraction of a former meaningless life. Mary gazes into the darkness of the tomb and there's nothing to see but waste, indignity, horror, loss, cruelty, disgrace and despair. Mary looks into the deep

darkness of the tomb which awakens us to the desolation that often comes with being alive. Right here, beside the tombs is the paradox of all our lives: the wonder of fertility, the beauty and vibrancy of creation on the one hand, and the everlasting darkness of death on the other.

The eternal question is, wherein lies the ultimate truth? Between the vibrancy of creation and the darkness of death, wherein lies the truth? There's only one word which sets in motion my victory lap.

But wait. Mary can hear someone whisper that morning has broken like the first morning, she can hear the Blackbird speak like the first bird, she can feel her feet wet from the dew, and she can see the rising sun beyond the horizon. In that moment of total dejection as she looked towards the darkness of the tomb, she hears that one word which she had known all her life-her own name.

*'Mary.'* The one who is looking into the darkness of a world without God suddenly hears the word, that one word which changes everything. That one word which turns our mourning into dancing, sadness into joy, grief into laughter, despair into hope and darkness into light. Mary lightened up when she heard her name. Yes, "I am the Good shepherd" he says. I know my sheep and I call them by their name. That one word which sets in motion my victory lap.

Easter, if you like, asks some strange questions, do you want to see the glory of God or you do not? By the way, what is your name? Do you ever hear the teacher call your name? What has so drawn you away from the teacher? What's imprisoned you?

Like many of you, every time I turn on the TV and listen to the news, I am horrified by what is going on in Ukraine and around the world. Indeed, there are many places around the world where people are suffering, where political turmoil is tearing communities apart. You see the mass graves and indiscriminate killings of ordinary people and you ask yourself, what a waste? Like many of the citizens of Ukraine and elsewhere you feel powerless, you stare at the floor on which your feet sit and await that one effort which will bring peace to your communities, that one word which sets in motion your victory lap.

Many of us, like Samuel, are looking deep into the emptiness that often comes with being alive. Mary's deep look into the empty tomb sums up our lives. And all we need is that one word which will give us that victory lap.

Amid your anguish, you hear your name. And so, you do the most simple and humble, yet, the most transformative turn you can ever make in your life. Like Mary, you turn round to behold who it is that called you. But this time it is the Rabbi. The same voice which called the prophets of old and called Mary from the abyss of life, now calls again because He knows your name. And hearing your name is that one word which sets in motion your victory lap.

Now, Mary is inhabiting a story of new beginnings, new blessings, and a new sense of belonging.

Being set free from her hopelessness, sadness and misery, she reaches out to embrace the risen Jesus. Because of COVID we haven't hugged in church in over two years, but I want you to reflect on any embrace or hug you've ever known: that of a child, a companion, a friend, lover, a stranger and a sympathizer. Mary meets her maker, redeemer and the one who empowers her. Above all she meets her Rabbi. Every time we hug someone we are reminding them of this most important hug of all. This is the touch of life, hope in the face of death, solidarity in the midst of bewilderment, reunion after trauma and tenderness overcoming isolation. That one word that changes every aspect of our lives and grants us victory over death and anything else.

Mary embraces her Rabbi and wouldn't let go. Don't hold on to me. He said. I am here for you just as much as I am here for everyone. Within that momentary embrace Mary discovers her true freedom as she hears the Rabbi invite her to go, go and tell my brothers. The point is you can only run when you are free. And you are always free to run. Don't sit and stare at the floor any longer. The floor doesn't provide answers to our questions. Run, run with the story of hope that life can be better than what it is. Run with the story that you can see the glory of God in the land of the living.

She who was powerless, pitiful and dejected is now purposeful, focused and energized. She has news to share with the brothers and the world, she's seen the glory of God, Christ has overcome death. The glory she has seen is also an answer to her question of wherein lies the truth of human life. The truth lies in the vibrancy of creation and death cannot supplant the creative purposes of God.

Easter's questions are: do you want to see the glory of God or you don't? How long can you stare at the bare floor? How long can you stare in the darkness of an empty tomb? The Rabbi is calling your name, but you are so focused on your hopelessness that you cannot even hear him. Easter's invitation is to allow yourself to be a resurrection story-a victory out of the prison in which you are trapped to a new kind of life. Allow yourself to hear that one word which sets in motion your victory lap. Allow yourself to answer the question, yes, I want to see the glory of God.

So here are three Easter words for you to consider. Turn. Touch. Go. Turn-from despair to joy. To turn is to realize that despair and hopelessness aren't enough, and that by being absorbed by them you're missing the gentle presence behind you. To touch- is to know that your desire to be held, loved and embraced have been met, and that you are free to run and share the joy of God with all people. To go-is to find life in every good work, bringing reconciliation, healing, compassion and renewal to those who are beset by grief, bitterness and hurt.

Do you want to see the glory of God, or you don't? This Easter morning, our compelling narrative is that nothing divine can die. That is why I know the Rabbi calls your name and mine, for he is alive. And because he's alive, I can call your name and you can call mine because we are alive-and that sets in motion our victory lap. It is good to be alive-for God's glory is ready to be made manifest in you and to guarantee your victory. Alleluia Christ is Risen. Amen.