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Ipswich Methodist Circuit  
Sermon: 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2020  
Series: Stand-Alone  
Scripture: John 20:1-20



## Hope Unlocked

*Hope Unlocked* was a theme released by Jason Moore of *Midnight Oil Productions* to be freely used and adapted without restrictions. This sermon is based on many of those ideas.  
<https://midnightoilproductions.com/hope-unlocked-resource-set/>



<John 20:1-20>

*Early on the first day of the week, **while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb** and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> **Jesus said to her, "Mary!"** She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "**I have seen the Lord**"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

*<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the **doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear** of the Jews, **Jesus came** and stood among them and said, "**Peace be with you.**" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples **rejoiced** when they saw the Lord.*



The word "lockdown" has gained new force in recent weeks. We used to hear the term in relation to prisoners: "Due to rioting, the inmates were 'in lockdown.'" Confined to their cells. Closed in, doors clanged shut. Their freedom of movement withdrawn. Their ability to socialize removed.

Just a few weeks ago we could not have imagined whole cities, counties, and countries being “locked down.” Stay at home, we have been told. Essential journeys only. One time of exercise a day. Keep a social distance of 6 feet away from everyone. Wear a mask if you are sick.

The world seems like a dark place right now. Yet it is Easter Day!! It feels wrong. It doesn't feel like Easter. We are still shut in. We want to be with each other celebrating, not locked away. But the loving thing to do right now is to stay put. *Love must practice the paradox that to be truly present for one another we must be physically distant from one another.*<sup>1</sup> And that brings up a whole lot of emotions in us, like **sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, and uncertainty.**

Point out three things from our scripture.



**ONE.**<sup>2</sup> Mary met Jesus in the dark. *Early on the first day of the week, **while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb.** And it was there she saw the gardener that she recognized was Jesus.*

The darkness is where resurrection begins. It is the place of uncertainty, fear and trembling. Yet it was the place where Jesus appeared to her. The place where Jesus glory was revealed.

And she recognized him, because **he spoke her name.** Jesus knows your name too. Do you know the sound of Jesus' voice? Jesus said (John 10:27) *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.* Can you hear him calling?

The message of Easter is that even in death **there is hope.** Even in despair, **there is hope.** Even in darkness and sickness and disease and drought and famine and destruction **there is hope, because God, in Christ, has defeated death.** On that first Easter, Mary went to the tomb in the darkness full of despair, and what she found was hope.



**TWO.** The disciples met Jesus in a locked room. *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the **doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear** Jesus came and stood among them.*

Yes, for Jesus, death was overcome in a moment. But for everyone else, it unfolded over time. There was much frightened sheltering going on at first.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Davies, “Celebrating the Empty Tomb with an Empty Church” in *One World House – Mark Davies Blog*. <https://oneworldhouse.net/2020/04/04/celebrating-the-empty-tomb-with-an-empty-church/>

<sup>2</sup> Melanie C. Jones. “#BelieveHer” in WomenPreach! Inc. <https://www.womanpreach.org/believe-her-jones>.

The initial reaction of the disciples is fear. Even after Jesus' closest followers heard Mary's bold report of an empty grave, even after Peter and John sprinted to that tomb and saw it standing open, even after they entered and found graveclothes neatly laid aside and the grave vacant, even so... by the end of the day, the disciples were in lockdown – a self-imposed lockdown because they were afraid. Afraid for their lives. Afraid of an unforeseen and totally dislocating reality, wondrous as it was.

And we know what it is like to be afraid behind locked doors. *Will we catch the coronavirus? Will our loved ones? How many are going to die? Will life ever be the same? Will we survive financially?*

Behind those locked doors, with all that fear, **Jesus came and stood among them.** Jesus found them and was with them. And he offered them peace. And they were filled with joy.

I want you to know that hope. Easter reminds us that the resurrected Christ brings hope and joy to us even when we find ourselves behind the closed doors of fear and helplessness. In the light of Easter, deliverance from fear becomes a reality. Jesus will step through our locked doors and meet us there unlocking the doors of our hearts and bringing us hope.

**THREE.** Mary went and told her story and said *I've seen the Lord.*

Just a few months ago, I gave everyone in our three congregations a Star word. I have heard from some of you how meaningful those words have been for you. Little did I know that my word **hopefulness** would be so important this year.

Like Mary, *I've seen the Lord. I've seen the Lord* in all the ways that I have discovered that **hope** is alive.



Hope is alive in the ways that the earth is enjoying this breather. Smog has lifted everywhere. Nitrogen Dioxide levels in the air are down dramatically. London views, once covered in smog are clearer. People in India can see the Himalayan mountains from 125 miles away, a view not seen for 30 years.



Hope is alive as we watch Spring unfold. The birds are singing. The flowers are blooming. And we have a chance to listen without traffic noise, and time to see what we usually miss on those daily walks in our local neighbourhoods. I've watched the blossom come out, just this week, on the tree in my back garden.

Hope is alive with the NHS clap on Thursday evenings. A moment of great togetherness whilst socially distanced. And such an appreciation of all the essential workers putting their lives on the line. In my road, everyone is out there, and the sound echoes up and

down. I've heard from some of you too that it is happening in your neighbourhoods.

Hope is alive in connections made with old friends. I had a call totally out of the blue this week from a friend in California that I had not been in touch with for quite a while. It was a wonderful phone conversation, and so nice to hear from her.

Hope is alive in the ways that you are connecting with each other. Hope is alive with strangers helping to shop for neighbours that they barely know.

Hope is found when the NHS wanted 250,000 volunteers to help the vulnerable stay safe at home. They were overwhelmed when three times that number signed up for the volunteer army.

And hope is alive when people find new ways of connecting with technology. We have folk who are used to the used to the technology volunteering as readers for our online services. We have two couples reading for our holy week services that I talked through the technology and there were excited to be able to read our scripture.

And hope is alive when I read about how people do not want to go back to how things were before. God is doing a new thing in the world. We are being transformed. And I can't wait to see what is next!

Finish with this —Quote from the book *The Passion and the Cross* by Ronald Rolheiser<sup>3</sup>

***What the cross of Christ reveals is that when we are so paralyzed by fear and overcome by darkness that we can no longer help ourselves, when we have reached the stage where we can no longer open the door to let light and life in, God can still come through our locked doors, stand inside our fear and paralysis, and breathe out peace.*** The love that is revealed in Jesus' suffering and death, a love that is so other-centered that it can fully forgive and embrace its executioners, can pass through locked doors, melt frozen hearts, penetrate the walls of fear, and descend into our private hells and, precisely there, breathe out peace.



In the worst of times, live in hope. Death is defeated. The tomb door is open. **Hope is unlocked.**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!  
Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, "Revelations of the Cross" in *Minute Meditations* (Franciscan Media, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020). <https://blog.franciscanmedia.org/minute-meditations/revelations-of-the-cross-0-0>