

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, February 1st, 2026
Rev. Gerry Gallant

From the Tomb
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
John 20:1-18

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Come, let us gather in the presence of the Lord.
We come to meet our God, who calls us by name.

The Lord is faithful and full of mercy.
His love endures forever, and His truth is sure.

Lift up your hearts and minds.
We lift them to the One who gives life and peace.

Let us worship the Lord together.
We praise and honor Him, now and always.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Holy and sovereign God,
we come before You in reverent awe.
You are eternal, unchanging, and glorious in all Your ways.
You are light, and in You there is no darkness at all.
We praise You for Your mercy,
Your power, and Your faithfulness that never fails.
Draw near to us now as we draw near to You.
Quiet our hearts, focus our minds,
and lift our eyes from ourselves to Your majesty.
By Your Spirit, be present among us,
shape us by Your truth,

and receive the worship that belongs to You alone.

Amen.

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,

we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed.

We have trusted ourselves more than You,

loved comfort more than obedience,

and walked by sight rather than by faith.

Our hearts have been divided and our repentance incomplete.

Forgive us for our pride, our doubt,

and our coldness toward what is good.

Cleanse us, renew us, and restore us by Your grace.

Create in us clean hearts

and lead us again in the way of righteousness.

We ask this in the name of our Savior.

Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Your sins are pardoned.

The penalty is paid.

Thanks be to God.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.

For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,

Forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn #431: "Jesus, Where'er Thy People Meet"

Jesus, wher e'er thy people meet,

there they behold thy mercy seat;

where'er they seek thee thou art found,

and every place is hallowed ground.

Here may we prove the power of prayer
to strengthen faith and sweeten care,
to teach our faint desires to rise,
and bring all heaven before our eyes.

Lord, we are few, but thou art near,
nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear;
oh rend the heavens, come quickly down
and make a thousand hearts thine own.

Responsive Reading

Psalm 30:1-10

¹ I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

² O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.

³ **O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.**

⁴ Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.

⁵ **For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.**

**Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.**

⁶ As for me, I said in my prosperity,
"I shall never be moved."

⁷ **By your favor, O Lord,
you made my mountain stand strong;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.**

⁸ To you, O Lord, I cry,
and to the Lord I plead for mercy:

⁹ **"What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the pit?**

Will the dust praise you?

Will it tell of your faithfulness?

¹⁰ **Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me!
O Lord, be my helper!"**

Anthem (Music Ministry): “In Mercy Broken”

Prayer for illumination

(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

John 20:1-18

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² 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.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” 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.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for 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.’ ” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Sermon

Last week we finished studying John chapter 19, a chapter that closed with the heavy silence of the finality of death. We saw the body of Christ hanging upon the cross, his flesh bruised and torn, a spear has pierced His side, and finally we see him taken from the cross, to be laid to His

final rest in a borrowed tomb. Time passes and nothing happens. The day-to-day life of the earth goes uninterrupted; God is at rest while His son is at work in the grave.

John wants us to remain here for a moment, feeling the weight of Jesus's death, the Reality of the Sacrifice that he made upon the cross when he took our place. He wants us to confront the reality, the brutality, the cruelty of what has happened when Jesus was crucified in the place of Barabas, crucified for you and I as a substitute.

Even as he starts into chapter 20 the resurrection does not just burst forth as a scene of victory. It does not begin with the proclamation of the risen Lord, instead it begins with the confusion of a missing body, it does not start with faith in an eternal God, but grief of a lost rabbi. It does not begin with shouts of joy but instead with panicked feet running through the darkness before the dawn. The glory of Easter morning rises out of the sorrow that does not yet fully understand what God has done.

John 20:1

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

Augustine reminds us that the silence of the tomb is not the absence of God but the preparation for his revelation. The stillness of the tomb is needed to amplify the glory of the resurrection.

John Calvin calls the resurrection 'the most important article of our faith' and indeed it is. This is why the cross in Protestant churches stands empty—we are not denying the death of Christ, but proclaiming the triumph of His resurrection.

John's narrative is written to assure us of the authenticity of the risen Lord. It starts with a reality that we can all relate to, Mary going to an empty tomb, a place where she finds both physical darkness and spiritual darkness, a darkness that envelopes her, a darkness that only the light of Christ can expel. John does not give us a typical story of heroism and triumph, instead he gives us the reality of grief, confusion and the slow dawning of hope.

Mary comes to the tomb while it is still Dark, not just in the sense of chronological time, but also theologically. The light of the resurrection has dawned, but Mary is still walking in the shadows of her grief. She comes out of her devotion to Jesus, to finish the preparations for his entombment that had not been completed at the time of His burial. Her love for Jesus is sincere, but her hope is limited to the realities that she knows, Jesus is dead and from that there is no return.

She discovers a missing stone, which does not produce the joy of a resurrection, but instead the panic of a robbery. She is filled with emotions, thinking of the desecration of the tomb, the

theft of the body and the loss of her Rabbi. The empty tomb is not yet good news because no one truly understands what has happened yet.

John 20:2

² 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.”

So, Mary runs, her grief motivating her actions. She runs to the ones she knows and trusts and gives a proclamation filled with confusion, **‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’** Her choice of words tells us that she did not go to the tomb alone and that those who are with her are just as lost and confused.

John focuses on Mary, her deep devotion to Jesus in getting up early and going to the tomb, a love that persisted even when hope was gone. Mary a woman, someone who would have no power of testimony in the courts of the Jews was the first witness of the resurrection. Mary whose confusion and panic is a mirror of our own spiritual blindness in this world, where we often look at God’s actions through the lens of loss rather than the promise of hope. Mary, who arrives at the tomb in faithfulness and sorrow, will eventually see the tomb as a place filled with hope and joy.

John 20:3-4

³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.

⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

The news of the empty tomb produces urgency in the disciples. Peter and John race to the tomb because something has disrupted the finality of the death that they witnessed upon the cross. Again the Gospel does not speak of a calm meditation and deep reflection on what has occurred, but instead a sense of action, quick movement, urgency and pursuit, as they race one another to the entrance of the tomb.

John is a picture of Christianity, he is filled with humility because he does not name himself, and filled with humanity, because he feels the need to tell us he arrived first. This is his testimony, this is reality that he is writing out for future generations to understand. John and Peter raced to the tomb of Jesus Christ, running as fast as they could, hearts filled with confusion and an expectation that they cannot express.

The truth of the risen Lord does not first come to men who are reflecting upon the Scriptures, instead it comes to men racing forward into something that they do not yet understand. They do not yet know that Jesus has risen, but hope is already at work in them, before clarity even arrives.

They run with souls that are longing for truth, moving quickly, marked by haste and confusion. The empty tomb interrupts the life that they thought they would be living, it compels movement, it demands a response.

That is the urgency of faith. It is often marked by confusion and haste, a sense of the need to get something done.

Faith does not have it all figured out, faith does not have all the answers, faith runs towards the unknown, propelled by hope, drawn by love and awakened by grace.

John arrives first.

John 20:5-7

⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

John stops at the entrance to the tomb, he stoops and looks in, he sees the emptiness of the tomb, but he does not enter yet. He observes carefully, yet he hesitates.

Peter, however, does not. Peter does as he always does and moves forward without hesitation.

And instead of finding the chaos of a tomb that has been robbed they find order, they find intention. The grave clothes are not tossed aside, or missing, they are lying there as if unused.

The face cloth that would have been lain over the face of the body of Jesus, was not missing or trampled on the floor, it was neatly folded and placed beside the grave clothes as if someone had taken off their sleeping mask after a good night rest.

Whatever has happened in the tomb, it happened with purpose, with authority and with peace.

Then John enters.

John 20:8-9

⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

John enters and John believes. Notice he does not yet fully understand what has happened. He does not have scriptural clarity, but he has true faith. He sees and believes that Jesus has risen before his mind understands the how's and whys of how Jesus has risen. Faith often precedes comprehension, this is why we study the Scripture each week, this is why we have Bible studies and fellowship, you help one another grow in understanding of what we believe by faith. This is why a Bible believing, Bible teaching community of fellowship is so important.

John grasps the reality of the empty tomb long before he understands the doctrine of the resurrection.

John and Peter exit the tomb with a fact that they know is truth, and no way to explain it or understand it.

This is faith, reason alone can not explain the empty tomb, the folded cloths, reason alone cannot grasp at the mystery of God. Faith often comes before understanding, and the faith of John and Peter is real, even if it is unexplainable and incomplete. The gospel invites the faithful to trust in things we cannot fully understand or explain, to step into that tomb and see what God has done, even if it is beyond our understanding or imagination.

As John and Peter wrestle with understanding the empty tomb, Mary remains outside the tomb. Enveloped in her grief, she does not yet understand what has happened, she still believes that grave robbers have taken the body, but her devotion to Jesus refuses to let her walk away.

John 20:11-13

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ 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."

She looks into the tomb and sees two angels, yet she is not filled with fear. Her loss is great and it is overruling her heart and mind. Heaven speaks to her, '**Woman, why are you weeping?**' and grief responds, '**They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.**' Even in his death Mary still claims Jesus as her Lord.

The angels did not ask why she was weeping because they did not know, they know why she is weeping, they ask because they want her to see that she has no need to weep, her sorrow is about to be filled with great joy.

Mary's devotion is rewarded not with an immediate understanding of all that has happened but with a gradual unveiling of God's Glory. Her sorrow is not dismissed by the angels but instead it

is transformed, reminding us that God often meets us in our times of grief and suffering and leads us into His peace and joy.

John 20:14-16

¹⁴ **Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.** ¹⁵ **Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”** 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.”** ¹⁶ **Jesus said to her, “Mary.”** She turned and said to him in Aramaic, **“Rabboni!”** (which means **Teacher**).

The resurrected Lord stands behind her, yet she turns to him and does not recognize him through her sorrow-filled eyes. Tears blur her sight; expectations shape her perception. Instead of seeing what God has done, she sees what she expects to see.

Jesus speaks gently. He asks her the very same question that the angels had asked of her, with one important addition, **‘Whom are you seeking?’**

Her answer reveals her devotion and her misunderstanding. She still believes that death rules supreme, that the body of her Rabbi has been taken, **‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’**

Then she hears a single word. One word spoken from a voice that she never thought she would hear again, **‘Mary.’** That is all it takes. The Shepherd calls his sheep by name and they know his voice. The resurrection is not proven to her in the Scripture, or through Scriptural evidence, it is shown through relationship. Her eyes may have failed her, but her ears do not.

Mary hears the voice of her Lord and responds with recognition and reverence. The garden where the body was lain in death now is the place of the living Lord. Death has been defeated.

Even here in Mary we see faith explained. People come to faith through the hearing of the Word of God, the Word of God calls and the soul responds. Jesus meets Mary in her place of sorrow and confusion and calls her into a new life. Mary’s transformation from grief to joy is at the very heart of the Gospel, a movement from blindness to sight, from despair to hope through a personal relationship with the One True Living God.

John 20:17-18

¹⁷ **Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for 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.’ ”** ¹⁸ **Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.**

Jesus then redirects her faith. His resurrection is not for her alone, it is to be proclaimed to the world. He sends her forth to His disciples, calling them brothers.

This is important for us to understand that the very first witness to the resurrected Lord was not John, or Peter, or any of the other disciples. It was not some powerful king or emperor, it was not a military leader, not a powerful politician or religious leader.

It was a woman who was once bound by darkness, a woman who had little to know legal status in her culture or in society. Grace delights in reversing expectations. The risen Christ entrusts the message of his resurrection not to someone who is powerful in worldly ways, but to one who lives in faithful obedience, one who simply loves him first in this world.

And Mary obeys, she goes forth and declares what she has seen and heard. The Gospel moves from a garden to a gathering, from tears of sorrow to speech of joy, from a tomb, a place death and emptiness, to a living testimony.

John reminds us all, the resurrection does not erase grief by denying it, but instead it transforms it by meeting it. The risen Christ comes not to those who expect Him, but to those who seek him, weep for him, and remain near to Him, even when all hope seems gone.

The stone was rolled away from the tomb not so that Jesus could escape, but so that we could look in. So that we could witness that death had been undone, sorrow had been answered and the Living Christ calls his people by name.

The resurrection is the foundation of Christian hope, the answer to all our sorrow, the promise of new life.

So lift your eyes to the empty cross. Run to the empty tomb. Proclaim the risen Lord. And go forth as Salt and Light, declaring that His light will never be overcome by darkness.

A Prayer of Augustine of Hippo

O Lord our God,
grant us to love You with all our heart,
with all our soul, and with all our mind.
Let nothing be sweeter to us than You,
nothing dearer, nothing more pleasing.

Order our days by Your truth,
and guide our steps by Your mercy,
that we may walk in the light of Your presence

and persevere in faith to the end.

Give us grace to die to sin
and to live unto righteousness,
that, being made alive in Christ,
we may seek the things that are above,
where He reigns with You in glory.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Communion

Invitation to the Table

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
this is the joyful feast of the people of God.

At this Table, Christ offers Himself to His church
as spiritual nourishment and comfort.
Here, by faith, we partake of the benefits
of His once-for-all sacrifice,
and are strengthened in our communion with Him
and with one another.

Come—not because you are worthy in yourself,
but because Christ is worthy;
not because you are strong,
but because He is gracious.

Come with repentance,
come with faith,
come looking away from yourself
and wholly unto Christ.

For all who belong to Him,
who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
and who desire to live unto His glory,
this Table is prepared for you.

Let us Pray,

Merciful God,
 we confess that we are sinners in need of grace.
 We have fallen short of Your glory and cannot stand before You on our own.
 We bring nothing to commend ourselves,
 only our need and our trust in Your mercy.
 We turn from our sin and from every false hope,
 and we look to Jesus Christ alone.
 We believe that He gave His body for us
 and shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins.
 We receive Him by faith as our Savior
 and submit to Him as our Lord.

Cleanse our hearts,
 renew our minds,
 and restore us by Your grace.
 As we come to this table,
 feed us with Christ Himself,
 strengthen our faith,
 and deepen our repentance,
 that we may walk in newness of life.
 We ask this with humble hearts,
 trusting in Your steadfast love.
Amen.

The Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
**It is right and fitting
 to give Him thanks and praise.**

Gracious and merciful God, it is right and fitting that we give You thanks and praise. You are the giver of life, the source of mercy, and the Lord of our salvation.
We thank You for Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness through all generations.

We thank You that You did not leave us in our sin, but sent Your Son to be our Savior. In Him You took on our flesh, bore our guilt, and conquered our death.¹
Thanks be to You, O God, for Your redeeming grace.

By His obedience and sacrifice, You have made peace where there was enmity and brought life where there was death.
We praise You for the victory of Your grace and the hope You have given us.

As we come to this table, we do not trust in ourselves, but in Your mercy alone.
Feed us by Your Spirit and strengthen us in faith.

Unite us to Christ and to one another, that we may live as one body, faithful in love and bold in witness.
Make us thankful people, living for Your glory.

To You be all glory, honor, and thanksgiving, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Let us together confess the faith of the church at all times and in all places:

The Apostles Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
 creator of heaven and earth.
 I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;
 he descended to the dead.
 On the third day he rose again;
 he ascended into heaven,
 he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting. AMEN.**

Communion

On the night He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread,
and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said,
"This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
(Luke 22:19)

We remember that His body was broken for us,
that we might be healed, forgiven, and restored.

In the same way, He took the cup, saying,
*"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for many for the
forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*
(Luke 22:20)

We remember that His blood was shed for us,
the innocent for the guilty,
the righteous for sinners.

Taking of the bread

Take, eat, and remember:
Christ died in our place,
and by His body we are united to Him
and to one another in the bond of peace.
Let us eat together, proclaiming the Lord's body broken for us.

Drinking of the cup

Take, drink, and remember:
we are redeemed, reconciled, and washed clean,
not by our works,
but by the one sacrifice of Christ Jesus our Lord.
Let us drink together, proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes.

Prayer after Communion

Gracious and faithful God,
we thank You for meeting us at this table
and for nourishing us with the signs of Your grace.
You have fed us not because we are worthy,
but because You are merciful.
Strengthen us now by what we have received,
that our faith would be renewed,
our hope made firm,

and our love enlarged.
 Send us out in the power of Your Spirit to live as grateful and obedient people.
 Keep us in unity,
 guard us in holiness,
 and help us to bear faithful witness in word and deed.
 May the life of Christ be seen in us as we go from this place,
 until that day when we feast with Him in glory.
 We give You all thanks and praise,
 now and forever.
Amen.

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Offertory Prayer **(Congregant Prepared)**

Closing Hymn #461: "Be Thou My Vision"

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
 Naught be all else to me save that thou art.
 Thou my best thought by day and by night;
 Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;
 Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
 Thou and thou only, first in my heart,
 High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of Heaven, when the battle is done,
 Grant heaven's joys to me, O bright heav'ns Sun;
 Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
 Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Pastoral Prayer

Faithful and gracious Father,
 we thank You for the gift of Your presence among us.
 You have spoken, and Your Word does not return empty.
 We ask now that what has been heard with the ear
 would be received by the heart

and worked out in our lives by the power of Your Spirit.
Do not allow us to be hearers only,
but make us obedient and joyful doers of Your will.

Strengthen the weary,
comfort the sorrowing,
steady the doubting,
and awaken the complacent.
Where sin still clings to us, grant repentance.
Where fear grips us, give holy confidence.
Where love has grown cold, rekindle it with a deeper sight of Your mercy and grace.
Teach us to walk in humility,
to speak with wisdom,
and to live in a manner worthy of the calling we have received.

As we go from this place,
keep us mindful that we belong to You.
Guard us from temptation,
anchor us in truth,
and make our lives a faithful witness in a watching world.
Until that day when faith becomes sight,
hold us fast by Your unfailing hand,
for we ask all this trusting not in ourselves,
but in Your steadfast love.
Amen.

Benediction

Beloved, Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed.
May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great
Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good that you may do His will,
working in you that which is pleasing in His sight.
Go in resurrection power,
in resurrection hope,
and in resurrection joy.