

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Easter Dawn
April 4, 2021
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
What are you looking for?

— John 20:1-18

What are you looking for? We spend a lot of time looking and searching. We go on Amazon looking for just one thing, but then you see all these other products and you start clicking those links at the bottom and you forgot what you were looking for. What are you looking for? This past year some of you were searching for a job and maybe you still are. During that search there can be a lot of uncertainty—“What will I do? Where will I work? How will I provide?” If you’re on the hunt for a house under current real estate market, there’s some pressure— “Will I find a house? Where will I live?” What are you looking for? Sometimes the things we search for are tangible. Other times we look for something more. Maybe you are looking for a relationship or a friendship. We look for love and support. We look for acceptance and affirmation. In the work place, you look for more than just a paycheck—you look for respect and appreciation for the work you do. What are you looking for?

Whatever it is we are looking for it all really comes down to hope. We hope we can find what we are looking for. We hope we will get that job. We hope to get what we are looking for in relationships. We hope. That’s why spend so much time searching, browsing, hoping for something more. But by nature, we tend to put our hope in things that are so uncertain. We put our hope in tangible things, the things that are right in front of us, things that give us an instant gratification. But those things are so fleeting. They don’t last. And that’s just a grim reminder that we don’t last in this life. We are perishable. We have a shelf life. So do the people we know and love.

That’s where we find Mary Magdalene early that morning. She’s weeping and still grappling with the reality of death. I don’t know what Mary’s hopes and dreams were in life, but for a period of time that morning Mary’s hopes and dreams were shattered. Her Lord, her teacher, her Savior, had died. She had only hoped to find Jesus’ dead body in the tomb, but now even that was gone. What now? She turned from the empty tomb to keep looking. Then this man, Mary thought it was the gardener, asked her, ***“Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”***

We’ve been asking the wrong question this morning. When that nagging uncertainty crosses our minds and we begin to search for hope, remember it’s not a *what*, it’s a *who*. And remember who exactly it is who brings hope. Mary and the other women, and Peter and John were looking for the right person but they didn’t fully understand. In their minds their hopes were shattered, but in reality death itself was shattered! Jesus came back from dead. Jesus lived. Picture Mary with such grief and such uncertainty. And then Jesus simply asks, “Who are you looking for?” And he didn’t leave her hanging for very long. He said, “Mary.” And Mary knew that voice. And she cried out, “Rabboni! —my Teacher!” And Mary literally held on to Jesus.

Mary found hope and comfort not in something tangible, but in someone tangible and real. We have put our hope in things that are tangible. But those things are so fleeting. Even though right now they are very real, one day they will be gone. They don’t bring lasting hope. But in Jesus we find lasting, tangible hope. We don’t always think of Jesus and his promise as something tangible, something we can physically grasp. But realize that Jesus Christ is not just a concept. Our faith is not merely in the teachings of Jesus Christ, but in the Teacher himself. Jesus physically rose from the dead and to this day Jesus lives as true God and true man with very real human flesh. It doesn’t get more tangible than that. You and I have not seen Jesus with our own eyes. We have not hugged him with our own arms. But Mary did. Many others saw Jesus and even touched after he rose from the dead. He invited his disciples to see and touch him so that they could be certain that he lives and is victorious over sin and death.

The comfort we have, the hope that we have in Jesus Christ is not just a concept. It’s real and it is in a real person. Just as real as the person Jesus Christ is the forgiveness that he proclaims to you by his death and resurrection. Jesus as real and living as Jesus Christ is the hope and certainty of eternal life. Just as tangible as the flesh of Jesus Christ risen from the dead is the new body that you will receive when Jesus raises you from the dead to live with him forever.

The things we can hold right now in our hands will one day be gone. Right now we don’t physically hold Jesus in our hands the same way Mary did, but one day we will be able to do just that. Because he really rose from the dead and because he will really raise us back to life, we can be certain that just as Mary held onto Jesus we too will one day be able to do the same. With our own eyes we will see him. With our own arms we will be able to embrace him. That is certain hope for uncertain times. Amen.