

Sunday, April 4, 2021

Easter Pageant

Pastor Adam Ericksen, Clackamas United Church of Christ

Mary Magdalene – Amira Stanley

Peter – Larry Kirk

Judas – Jeff Pratt

Thomas – Al Larson

Mary of Nazareth – Lita Pratt

Jesus – David Palanuk

Prelude – Russian Easter Prelude

Song: Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Mary Magdalene – (Excited!!!) Have you heard the news?!? It's so good! He is Risen! He told me to tell you all about it. Listen. He was murdered just a few days ago. Hung on the cross to die. I followed him there and saw it with my own eyes. It was awful. They pierced him with a spear. Water and blood came pouring out of him. He cried out in pain so many times.

I came here this morning to the garden where his tomb is to anoint his body. (turns from excited to serious/sad) But his body was gone. I was so sad. I mean, could things get any worse? I loved that man, and now I couldn't even anoint his dead body because someone stole it. Then a man appeared. He said,

Jesus: His body isn't in the tomb anymore.

Mary: I replied to him, "You are the gardener. You are in charge of this place and you're supposed to know where his body is. Please don't play games with me. The last few days have been the worst in my life, and now this. Tell me where he is! My God, why have you forsaken us? Why did you forsake him?!?"

Then the gardener looked me in the eyes and said,

Jesus: Mary.

It was him! God hadn't forsaken him or us! God raised him to new life. I wanted to hold on to him so tightly, but he told me to keep social distance, because he needed to ascend to the Father.

Then he told me to go tell the guys all about his resurrection, that death couldn't keep him or any of us from the love of God. Imagine that! Me! The first preacher of the resurrection! This is Good News indeed!

Song – I Come to the Garden Alone

Peter – (starts sad) I betrayed him. (Pause) I promised him the whole time that I would never betray or abandon him. And I did both.

He even fed us that night. He fed all of us. He fed me. And then we scattered.

Everyone blames Judas. Poor Judas. But the rest of us were really no better.

I mean, I'll never forget those words when Jesus said to me,

Jesus: Peter, you are my Rock.

Peter: And look what I did. He should have called me his Pebble. I was there in the courtyard as they took him away to be crucified. I stayed next to the fire with the others. Some of them pointed at me and shouted, "You are one of his followers!"

Peter: "No," I yelled. "I've never known the man." They accused me three times and I denied Jesus three times. And then the cock crowed, just as he had predicted. He walked by at a distance as they took him away. And we made eye contact. Then I realized what I had done. I promised him that I would never leave his side. But I betrayed him. And then I wept.

The guilt was overwhelming. How could I do that to him? He believed in me. He even believed I could walk on water, just like he did! But I took my eyes off of him because I was afraid of the storm that raged around him. I didn't want to get caught up in it. And so I abandoned him to his death.

(Starting to get progressively excited) Then Mary came and told us that he had risen! How could that be?!?

I ran to the tomb to find him. Once, a little later when we were at the beach, he asked me,

Jesus: Peter, do you love me?

Peter: I said "yes." He told me,

Jesus: Then feed my sheep.

Peter: He told me three times to feed his sheep. It was then that I realized that even though I did the worst thing I could ever think of, abandon and betray Jesus, and deny him three times, he forgave me. He still believed in me.

(smiling) That kind of love! That kind of grace! I don't deserve it! I can't believe it! But it is real!

Judas – I betrayed him. (Pause) I promised him the whole time that I would never betray or abandon him. And I did both.

He even fed us that night. He fed all of us. He fed me. And then we scattered. I'm the one to blame. I deserve whatever I get.

I mean, I betrayed and abandoned all of them. For just thirty pieces of silver.

All of us men promised that we would stay with him until the end. We thought we were so tough, willing to give our lives to the new kingdom he was going to create. He kept telling us these short stories about powerful kings and powerless peasants. I always thought he would be the powerful king and together we would destroy our enemies. Turns out he was more like the powerless peasants and wanted us to be more like servants, not conquerors.

I began to see that he really meant it when he said we were going to love our enemies. That God's kingdom wouldn't come through violence, but through radical love.

None of us really believed him. But I'm the worst of them all. I betrayed him. And then they killed him.

I heard rumors that he rose from the dead. Rumors that he even forgave Peter. The thought crossed my mind that he might forgive me, too. But then I came to my senses.

Jesus: Judas, I for...

Judas: (Cutting off Jesus before he can say "forgive") I mean, that kind of love. That kind grace. I don't deserve it. I can't believe it. It can't be real....

Song – Amazing Grace

Thomas – I doubt it.

Thomas: "Thomas!" They said to me. "We have seen him!"

"No way," I replied. "Unless I see the wounds in his side, I won't believe it."

I bet some of you have doubts, too. I mean, who ever heard of someone dying and rising? Sure, we've all heard the myths of dying and rising gods, but we all know those are myths. There are some of us who believe that at the end of time, everyone will resurrect, but that's going to happen much later. No one thought someone would rise from the dead before the end of time.

So no. I refused to believe it. I mean, he was a total failure. We expected him to conquer the bad guys, not be conquered by them. Why would God raise up a total loser?

I didn't believe it.

Except then he came to me. He said to me...

Jesus: Thomas, put your finger here in the wound on my side.

Thomas: So I did. I had no idea what to say next. I was in awe. So I blurted out, "My Lord and my God."

And do you know what is even more remarkable than me putting my finger in his side? He knew that I doubted him. And yet he didn't hold it against me. I mean, there he was right in front of me, and I still couldn't believe what I was seeing! I must have been hallucinating. Or maybe someone was playing a trick on us. But no, it was real. I don't know how to explain it, but it was more real than anything I've ever experienced.

I still have my doubts about the whole thing. But I've learned that that's okay. It doesn't bother Jesus. After all, I have doubts, but the point is that he believes in me. He believes in us. So I've decided that I'm going to live as if it is true. You know, love is stronger than all the forces of evil in this world. That's hard to believe sometimes. Sometimes I have my doubts about that, too. But it's true. That's what this whole thing means. I can't explain it other than saying love is stronger than my doubts, than my betrayal of him, even stronger than all the evil in the world.

Song – Hallelujah Gracious Jesus

Mary of Nazareth –

Jesus: Mom, it's going to be okay.

Mary: "No it's not!" I yelled at him. "I am your mother! Your father is gone. You are the oldest and I need you to be around. Your family needs you! Why don't you and that nice girl Mary just settle down and get married and have a nice life together?"

I knew it wouldn't work. He had his mind set. Or maybe God had his mind set. I just couldn't stand the thought of losing him. Deep down, I knew what he had to do. And I knew what the religious and political leaders would do to him. Ever since his birth I knew that he would cause the downfall of many rulers. He would bring down the powerful and raise up the lowly.

I even sang about that before he was born. But I'm his mother. It was just so hard to know he would be crucified. It was like a sword pierced my soul. But he reminded me to trust. Yes, the powers would kill him, but remember, God's love is stronger than death. Nothing in this world can separate us from God's love. Not corrupt religious leaders. Not violent politicians. Not even death.

So I followed him to the cross. I listened to my son cry out in pain. I wanted to run over there and take him down. I wanted to protect him. But he kept telling me that it would be okay. To trust that somehow death doesn't have the last word. That even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, because God is with us. And there is light and love and life on the other side. I know this now because my son lives! He is risen!

Song – I Know My Redeemer Lives

Benediction