

Encountering the resurrection

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The music is out in brassy force, the altar flowers are in full bloom, and the sanctuary is full of people not seen since December. Ironically, even the visitors know the story, or imagine they do, and the lectionary readings are always the same—Matthew or John. What does the preacher say in her second, or 22nd Easter sermon that wasn't said before?

A sermon could be preached focused on one or all of the disciples in John's account. The three types of discipleship will be represented in your congregation on Easter morning. I suggest that each of the following types represents one of the classic virtues of faith, hope, and love.

- the beloved disciple, the disciple of faith

The beloved disciple is the first of the three to believe. He pokes his head in the empty tomb and, as John says, "He saw and believed." His faith is confident and secure. He does not wait to analyze the evidence like Peter, or see the wounds like Thomas, or hear his name called like Mary. He has walked the obedient road of faith alongside his Lord and his faith has made him well. He sees and believes.

These are the steady saints of faith sitting in the pews Easter morning.

- Mary, the disciple of love

Courageous Mary stood at the foot of the suffering cross while the male disciples were cowering from the Romans. She is the first to reach the tomb in the half-light of dawn, the first to weep over the body's disappearance, and the first to proclaim the Risen Christ. Her grief is as acute as her love. Jesus gave her a place in community, valued her gifts and contributions, and showed her purpose. Her weeping comes from

the place of shattered dreams and a bleeding heart. Then Jesus calls her by name, holds her in his arms and restores her to the newness of life.

Many of these disciples, whose lives are in chaos, who are grieving the loss of a loved one, who desperately need to hear the Lord calling their name, will be in the pews on Sunday.

- Peter, the disciple of hope

Peter is the first of the three to actually go in the tomb and look around. He is evidence driven: empty tomb, stone rolled aside, linen cloth, no body. Peter lives in a world of rationality, of cause and effect, with the laws of motion and mechanics soundly in place. Dead bodies do not disappear; somebody has to move them. Peter leaves the tomb unaware of the Lord's resurrection. He doesn't believe until much later when Mary tells him her story and convinces him that the good news is real.

Peter is the disciple of hope because he gives hope to the rest of us plain Jane and Joe disciples. Through all his smugness, his denials, his "just not getting it"; through his missteps and mistakes, and now through completely missing the central moment of our faith—he is still the one upon whom Jesus builds his church.

Not everyone has the beloved disciple's faith, or the depth of Mary's love. But all of us sitting in worship on Easter can find hope in Peter.

These three disciples will show up at your church this Sunday. The good news: Easter resurrection comes to them all.