

Sermons from West Denmark



West Denmark Lutheran Church Luck, Wisconsin westdenmark.org

**Easter Sunday
April 5, 2026**

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[John 20:1-18](#)

December 25. I like that. You always know when to expect Christmas. But Easter is a different story. Somebody says, “Easter’s early this year”--I say, *oh, ok, looks like we’ll have to shovel out the egg hunt.* Or “Isn’t Easter late this year?” *Whatever you say—I guess we’ll have daffodils for the centerpiece.* I’m not the only one confused, apparently. The image on your bulletin is a calendar for the dates of 95 Easters beginning the year 532, carved into the marble of a cathedral in Italy, I guess so they wouldn’t miss it, at least for 95 years. I finally did the research to share with you what determines the date of Easter, and I’m happy to declare to you that all will now finally be clear. Ever since it was codified in 325 A.D., at least for the Western Church, Easter has been the first Sunday after the first full moon (the Paschal Moon) after the spring equinox. Although we use the ecclesiastical equinox, which is fixed at March 21, to “simplify” things. They call this a “movable feast,” since it can fall anywhere between March 22 to April 25. Fun fact.

The Resurrection is such an old story, the entire New Testament would be written to chew on it, to digest its significance, that Jesus, dead, should live again. And here we are still, as we have for two thousand years on this movable feast day, trying to comprehend the depth and breadth of the mystery of the resurrection. And I know in those centuries there have been many dark years when the resurrection felt particularly poignant, but what about this year? Does it feel dark to you? Does hope feel out of reach?

We find Mary Magdalene standing desolate, weeping, in the garden. She feels, viscerally, the pain of death. In our mind’s eye, we set her in this beautiful garden, but the fact is, since they had carried Jesus’ body here to be buried, this garden was so

close to the hill called Golgotha that you could probably see it from there—between the olive trees and over rosebushes, the cross casting its evil shadow over green leaves and fragrant flowers.

She should have had an inkling. I mean, where other than a garden is so full of resurrection? A seed, dead and buried, sending up a plump, green shoot; the sprouting of cutover stumps; blossoms bursting from a dry twig; a log, fallen, with a line of tender saplings to mark its composting body. This place reminds us of Genesis, which began in a garden. There, still bright with the dew of creation humans chose death over the life that God gave. Where other than a garden should the life that God gives conquer the death we chose? Where other than a garden should a new creation begin?

But there I go, availing myself of two thousand years of mulling over the mystery—here is Mary, standing in the garden, her tears falling to the dew-wet ground, grieving her dead Teacher. Forget the smut you might've heard about her—she was no prostitute—she was simply one of the women who followed Jesus. The only thing the Gospels really say about her is that she was the woman out of whom Jesus cast seven demons. Which makes her the disciple who had the most to overcome. Perhaps the disciple whom Jesus had rescued out of the deepest depths, the one who owed Jesus the most, the one therefore who might have loved Jesus the most.

The other disciples have come and gone, unable to puzzle out the clues they've seen: a tomb opened, a body missing. Still Mary stands there grieving. She goes into the tomb one more time, who knows why, maybe to touch the burial clothes (she thinks: *why would robbers have left them?*), maybe just to be in the place his body had last been. This time she's startled to meet two angels there (*when had they come in?*) and she hears someone's footsteps behind her. She turns. Maybe because of her tears, maybe because she's not expecting to ever see this person alive again, she doesn't recognize him.

And Jesus, in the guise of the gardener, asks her, "Whom are you seeking?" That question might have given him away, since it seems like it was always on his lips. It was the first question he asked his would-be disciples in this gospel, when they began to follow him and he turned to ask them: "What are you looking for?" And he asked it again in Gethsemane when the soldiers came to arrest him: "Whom are you seeking?"

It's his voice, though, saying her name, that finally pierces her grief and incredulity, her name on his lips that tells the whole story.

Overjoyed, Mary's first instinct is to run to him, to embrace him, but Jesus says to her, "Don't cling to me." This is the first post-resurrection command that Jesus gives. Don't cling to me. Let me go. She thought she knew where he was, lying dead in the tomb, and here she finds him, standing out in the garden, and her heart soars, but she can't hold on to him. She has to let him go on his way.

Jesus' post-resurrection life is filled with encounters like this, personal visitations, one-on-one conversations between Jesus and those whom he loved, who grieved over his death and now found themselves bewildered by the sight of him alive. Where would they go from here?

Where do you go from here? In this moment when evil and death feel all around us, you may be tempted to despair. All around us: in wars, in the hatred and suspicion with which people relate to one another, in the pride and insatiable greed that cause us to consume the natural world, in what feels like the spiralling downfall of our empire. We might encounter death in our relationships or in our appetites, in the thousand tiny losses that meet us in our lives. But the thing about death is that it's the first step of resurrection. In order for something to be resurrected, it has to die first. So when death is all around us, so could be resurrection.

The world is a garden—a garden overshadowed by a cross. In your despair, you look for Jesus and you don't see him; where you look for resurrection, you see only death. But in this garden Jesus still asks, "Whom are you seeking?" He wants to meet you like he did Mary Magdalene, to show you how his power of love and grace beats the power of sin and death every time, how we have nothing to fear from them because through his death he conquered them once and for all, and rising from the grave unfazed by their evil, he made all this victory belong to us as well.

I invite you to keep seeking for the risen Jesus. I invite you to keep your eyes open, even if your eyes, like Mary's, are filled with tears; maybe it's only through tears that you'll be able to look for the Savior in this broken world. But keep looking, because if you shy away from fully witnessing death, you may miss the resurrection.

But don't only look for him in a church or in the Bible—be ready for him to meet you in a dry seed, in the testimony of the most inappropriate people, in the death of something you love. There, in all the wrong places, you might meet him from time to time, and I hope you do. But Jesus warns you: no matter how hard you try, you're not going to be able to hold on to him.

So let him go. Don't stick him in one place and expect him to stay there. You can't own him, can't distribute him only to those who you think deserve him. Because

God is way bigger than we can comprehend, and so is the resurrection—it's like a mushroom cloud of grace, filling the horizon, or the Big Bang, continually expanding, permeating the universe with its power and hope.

It's a movable feast. It's a feast for every day of the year, unconfined by the walls we build up. It moves without our permission, works on the people we don't want it to work on, without our comprehension, we can't measure it or pin it down. It's working where you cannot see it, where through your tears all you see is darkness and death.

We go out into the world, into that garden suffused with the power of the Resurrection, and every day we eat a little bit of that feast.