

Who Could've Guessed
John 20: 1-18
Don Lincoln

Easter in my childhood home began with a hunt. Unlike Christmas, when my two sisters and I would arrive downstairs to find presents all nicely displayed under a tree, Easter was a hunt. We each our own uniquely shaped and colored Easter basket woven of willow and wood splint. Sometime before morning light, each basket had been hidden and it had to be found by its rightful owner.

One year, I couldn't find mine. I found my younger sister's hidden behind the couch. But left it there; didn't give it away. After some more looking, I found my older sister's inside the stereo cabinet; and likewise, kept a straight face and just ignored it. Eventually, my sisters both discovered their baskets, brought them into the kitchen table and began sorting through the candy – the goodies – that were in them.

I kept looking! And looking! And looking! Frustrated, I finally walked into kitchen where everybody had gathered by this point in time, still with no basket, and I'm guessing my mother saw that the Easter joy had all but left my face! And she asked, "Well, have you looked everywhere?" "YES!" "Everywhere in here?" she asked as she looked around the kitchen. Immediately, I began to look. I knew I had checked under the sink, I'd looked on top of the refrigerator, behind the bench, underneath the table.....the OVEN? Who puts an Easter basket in the oven? An appliance I'd never even opened myself – an appliance I don't think I even had opened at that point in life.

I couldn't imagine. But I swung open the door and yes, my mom had taken the racks out and there it was. Who could've guessed?

Mary Magdalene could not have guessed resurrection. We don't know if perhaps she has already been to Jesus' tomb numerous times since Friday perhaps even ignoring Sabbath rules and sneaking out on Saturday to linger, to ponder, to weep at the grave of her friend.

Mary was not expecting resurrection because things were as they had always been. A powerful crushing the innocent. The fearful finding an escape goat to assuage their anxiety about social upheaval. The energetic followers running away at the moment of crises. And the one who loudly claimed to be the most loyal of all the disciples denying that he ever knew the man charged with blasphemy and sedition. Things were just as they had always been.

Mary didn't come to the tomb that day expecting resurrection; she couldn't have guessed it so an empty tomb meant only one thing – grave robbers. So she runs to tell

Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Many believed the beloved disciple is John. He's never named; he's just described as the disciple Jesus loved. But he's only mentioned in John's Gospel. Maybe John was modest. Maybe John didn't want to sound too cocky about his standing or sound like he was bragging. Anyway, Mary runs and tells Peter and the beloved disciple that they had taken Jesus' body. So what do the two of them do? They run.

Did you notice there is a lot of running in this text? And the gospel writer, perhaps the disciple Jesus loved, does mention that the disciple who Jesus loved outran Peter to the tomb. If it is John, it is obvious that he's not so humble that he leaves out that little fun fact. But as we read on, John does tell the whole truth. They did not expect resurrection either.

John arrives first but waits outside. Peter runs up and heads right in – that is so Peter. He finds the linen wrappings lying there. The text then says the other disciple who reached the tomb first (notice he has to mention that again) also went in and he saw and believed.

Believed? Believed what? Believed what Mary had told them back at the house that they had taken the Lord from the tomb. Is that all they believed? Because the text goes on to say, “as yet, they did not understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.”

Nobody expected resurrection. Even when Jesus first speaks to her, Mary does not recognize Him and why should she, no one imagines resurrection. The funny thing is the unbelievable things you and I can imagine. Don't we all have our grand expectations and assumptions? That far too often are out of line with reality. We expect to be invincible or able to do what we want. Or be in charge. Or be able to fix everything, or succeed, or win. Even, of all times, in pandemic life which should teach us otherwise or simply confirmed about the truth of our human nature. Far too many of us think we know better – “Oh, give me a hug, I won't get it.” “I'll defy the odds, what are the chances?”

And that is so symbolic of our predicament.

The last week of Jesus' life – the week we call Holy Week. What a violent week it was. Pretty stories of betrayal, arrest, perjury, torture, mobs, death and burial.

Sometimes, preachers have to work hard to make connections between the Gospel and our daily lives. This past Holy Week – like the first one – the world has made all those connections for us – again and again. We need rescuing, saved. “And you and I cannot do it ourselves anymore,” says theologian Karl Barth, “and a drowning man can pull himself out of the water by his hair.” We cannot rescue ourselves from the human predicament even though we so often live as if we can.

Friends, that's what resurrection is about. The very thing you and I cannot do. The very thing we cannot imagine. The very thing we don't expect. The cross is humanity's

deadly, vicious response to the revolutionary boundary breaking love of God in Jesus Christ. Resurrection is God's response to our death-dealing ways. Resurrection begins with the dead and reveals a God who refuses to leave the dead alone. Resurrection is God's way of invading the world.

For God to save us, God had to invade and God's primary weapon is resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus. And then ours. And that's our good news. He has conquered death, he has risen like waves hitting the beach. The promises of God cannot be held at bay. You and I are Easter people handing out life jackets of hope in a sea of despair.

He is risen. He is risen. He is risen. And that makes ALL the difference in the world.

So friends, what do you say to Christ is Risen!
He is risen indeed!

Amen.