

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

5<sup>th</sup> April 2026 – Easter Sunday

**John 20:11-18**

**UNEXPECTEDLY EXPECTED**

We've possibly all had at least one of those occasions when we see someone outside of the usual context in which we would normally see them, and so although we know that we know them we struggle to put a name to their face. Can you relate to that? They come up and say, 'Hi', to you, and as you say 'Hi' in return it feels like your brain is working millions of miles an hour going, 'I know this person, I know them well, what is their name again?' I've seen skits of this where, in fishing for clues to get the other person's identity, the dialogue goes, 'And how's, err?', 'my wife, yeh she's good, thanks'. 'Are you still living at...?', 'The same place, yeh, we haven't moved'. The reality probably often is that the same panicked thought of, 'I know this person, what is their name again?', is probably also going through their head at the same time as you are feeling embarrassed about your lack of a personal response. It's not that you don't know them, it's just that seeing them in a different context throws out your memory. I know most of the people who come and worship with us each Sunday here on the Gold Coast, but if I met them while walking on the beach in southern Adelaide where my parents live, such an unexpected encounter would make me have to think hard of who they are. Unexpected meetings can challenge our recognition of who someone is.

And then, I wonder, if you have people who you have had so many of these unexpected meetings with, that they have almost become expected? Not just the one-off random bump into's we've just talked about, but with these people it seems to happen all the time in many very different places? There is a family who went to the church we attended many years ago in Sydney when we first met, with whom, while they were still living in Sydney and we were living in Moree and then on the Gold Coast, we randomly ran into at the Myer Centre in the middle of Adelaide, in Yamba when we both took our families there for a holiday, and then at a service station in Broken Hill when we were both passing through there – in different directions! Our families just meeting at the most unexpected times and places became so regular that it almost unexpectedly was expected.

When we meet people at times and in places where we don't expect to meet them, it can take a while for us to fully click into who they actually are. I wonder if this is what happened to Mary Magdalene on that first Easter Sunday morning. She, along with some other friends and family of Jesus, had seen Him die and knew He had been placed into a tomb. On Easter Sunday morning, after the Sabbath was over, she went to that tomb only to find that the stone covering its entrance had been rolled away. She found two of the disciples, Peter and John, who then went to the tomb themselves and found it empty, with only Jesus' burial cloths lying inside. After they left, Mary remained at the tomb, even seeing two angels inside it where Jesus' body had been but still then not realising what had happened. She says in John's account three times, to the disciples, the angels, and the man she thinks is the gardener (Jesus), that Jesus' body has been removed and she doesn't know where it has now been put. Despite what Jesus had said so many times to His followers about His rising from the dead, what has happened here is so unexpected that Mary can't even consider it.

It is a beautiful, emotional, scene, which we have described here. Jesus has changed the life of Mary Magdalene, who is sometimes seen as the insane outcast woman who He healed from her illness. She is described as one of His close followers in the three years of His public ministry, and she was there at the foot of the cross when He died. So again, seeing Him alive is not what she was expecting. Perhaps that's why she at first mistook Him for the gardener? But also, this isn't the only occasion after Jesus rose again that people took a while to recognise who He was; think of the two men who walked and talked with Him on the road to Emmaus. For both those two men, and here for Mary, it was Jesus' words of love and of invitation which opened their eyes to see that their Saviour was alive before them. Imagine Mary's reaction, the change in her outlook on her life and the whole world, when she came to see who was standing before her? All she can simply say is 'Teacher'. The sun is up with the Son who has risen. Jesus is alive! She is alive! The world is alive! The fear, sorrow, guilt, uncertainty which had stopped her from expecting what Jesus had taught her to expect, had stopped her from seeing the risen Jesus before her, has now gone! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

It can be said that every Easter Sunday morning for the past 2,000 years, we along with all Christians stand outside the tomb where the stone is rolled away, the burial cloths are left behind, and the angels say,

‘He is not here’. Like Mary, both we and the world have those things which can at times prevent us from seeing the truth of what these signs mean for us; stop us from seeing the signs which point us towards us expecting that which from a human viewpoint we weren’t expecting. Sometimes, even when we do know and believe this, we can find it hard to accept in all parts of our lives. On this morning, as we celebrate together Jesus’ rising from the dead, we can think about what are the doubts, the fears, the struggles, the griefs, the temptations, which can stop us from seeing the risen Jesus and what He means to us in our lives? Are there times and situations in our lives when, despite all we know about Him, we don’t expect Him to be able to help us out or carry us through? We know who Jesus is, on this day we worship and give thanks to God for both sending Jesus as our Saviour to die for us, and then to rise again so we also can have new life, but like Mary Magdalene and pretty much all the other followers of Jesus, do we at times find it hard to both expect and accept the change Jesus can make to our lives?

A part of this change is about the call Mary is given here, and each one of us is given, to be Jesus’ disciples. Taking up this call is also a part of the role as God’s people which the five adults who will be confirmed into membership of our congregation today will be a part of with us. Back in John 1, when Jesus met the two men who would become His first disciples He called them to come and follow Him, that is, to do His work in leading others to know Him. Now here, to Mary Magdalene, the first person Jesus speaks to after He has risen again, Jesus gives again the call to go and tell the disciples that He has risen again, and that He will be returning to the Father. Mary is the first one given this task of sharing the great news of the new life we have in Jesus out with the world. As He has revealed Himself to her, He now calls her to share the hope and joy she now has.

In Jesus rising again, the love and grace of God has come into our world. Although God had been talking to people about it for a long time, throughout the Old Testament, it was still very unexpected. The forgiveness and new life we have through this event changes our lives, and is something we too are now called to share. Both of these are things we pray about in the Living Grace Prayer we have been praying together as a congregation since Advent last year: ‘Lord, thank you that in Jesus your love and grace has come into our world and our lives. Help me to live and to love in a way that helps others to know your grace

also. Amen.’ In the first half of that prayer, we can think about what happened on Easter Sunday morning, when love and grace did come into our world and our lives. What does this mean for us? What does this change for us? Maybe try to really stop and imagine how Mary would have felt when she realised who Jesus was and accepted what had happened, and then apply the same joy of this news to our lives.

And then the second half of our prayer is about the call we now have to be witnesses, messengers, about this great event and what it means for our world and our lives: the way we live, the way we show God’s love to others, share God’s forgiveness, hope, peace, and joy with others. Do we always fully take up this call, or are there some situations in which we are reluctant to do this? Do we treat others in a way that reflects God’s love to them? The good news of Easter Sunday morning has changed not just our lives, but our world. Do we help people expect the unexpected peace, hope, and joy which can only come from God’s grace by the way we now live and love?

2,000 years ago, Mary Magdelene, quite unexpectedly, became the first witness to an event which changed the world and the lives of all who now believe the events of that first Easter Sunday. In Jesus, God not only came into the world, but in dying our death and rising again He has brought new life now and eternal life forever for all who turn to Him. Be expectantly expecting God’s grace in your life; know that He will be even in the parts of our world and our lives where we don’t expect Him to be. And hear and follow His call to share out the joy of His love and forgiveness as we show others what this now means to us. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Can you think of any times when you unexpectedly met up with someone so that you had problems recognising them? Were there any clues which helped you to do this?
- Imagine how Mary Magdelene and Jesus’ other family and friends would have been feeling on Easter Sunday morning. How would her feelings have changed when she recognised Jesus?
- What does it mean to you in your life that Jesus is now alive? Are there any times or situations in which you find it hard to fully accept and expect the changes this makes for you?
- Jesus also calls you to go out and share the good news that He is alive with others. How do you experience this call? Are there any parts of your life where you feel His call but are finding it hard to follow? Bring this to God in prayer for His strength and guidance.
- Pray the Living Grace Prayer. Try praying it slowly, half by half, picturing each section and what it means for you in your life.

Pray: thank God for sending Jesus as our risen Saviour. Pray that we know the love, joy, hope, and peace this love brings in our lives, and that by the work of the Holy Spirit we can now share this with others.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler  
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