

The Rev. Hannah Moderow / Easter 2 / April 12, 2026
St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska
Scripture: John 20:1-31
Song: Taylor Swift, "Marjorie." *Evermore*, Republic Records, 2020.

Mary Magdalene and Taylor Swift: An Easter Message

I want to take us back, for a moment, to our Easter story.

The writer of John's gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene set out for the tomb in darkness on the first day of the week; and when she arrived, she discovered the stone had been removed (John 20:1).

It's always made sense to me that a woman was first to discover the empty tomb.

Mary Magdalene didn't withhold this strange discovery. She ran back, presumably still in darkness, to tell Simon Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," she said, "and we do not know where they have laid him." (John 20:2)

Bewildered, Mary Magdalene, in that moment, could not figure out where Jesus' body had gone.

Mary Magdalene *knew better* than to think Jesus was alive.

And yet her words acted as a prelude... a teaser for unfolding revelation.

Mary Magdalene then returned to the empty tomb with Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. And, while the men discover the truth of Mary Magdalene's words—that the tomb was indeed empty—they *also* couldn't figure out what had happened to Jesus' body.

So they returned home.

But Mary Magdalene lingered...lingered at the empty tomb and wept.

We cannot know exactly what was spinning through her mind, but I imagine her replaying core memories from her time with Jesus...

Like when he said:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.” (John 13:34)

Or when he washed the feet of his closest friends (John 13:5).

Or maybe even when he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43).

Jesus’ earthly life had been so filled with miraculous meals, healings, wonders, parables, and teachings that he turned the ancient world as Mary Magdalene and the others knew it... completely on its head.

Jesus taught bold and disruptive LOVE, and dismantled core beliefs about societal power. He raised up the lowly, and gave voice to those who had no status.

Jesus commanded a LOVE that had no precedent.

And yet, with all that promise that Jesus brought and lived out in the world, Mary Magdalene watched with her own eyes in horror—just three days earlier— as her teacher died a gruesome death on the Cross.

Mary Magdalene wept with the realization of Jesus’ tragic ending. **How could the great promise of Jesus die?**

Then two angels appeared and asked Mary Magdalene why she was weeping, to which she replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” (John 20:13)

Mary Magdalene turned to see a man standing behind her, but she didn’t recognize him and assumed he was the gardener.

When Jesus finally called her by name, “Mary!” (John 20:16)— she recognized him. And finally understood.

Jesus was Alive, so alive!

Mary Magdalene rushed back to the disciples who were locked up at home.

“I have seen the Lord,” Mary Magdalene proclaimed.... and the rest is history.

Friends, it's safe to say that Mary Magdalene preached the first ever Easter sermon...A woman, of all scandals.

"I have seen the Lord." This is a brilliant five-word proclamation of resurrection.

As a spiritual guide, Mary Magdalene offers us an example... an invitation to grieve openly, and grapple with our sorrows, and in that place, we may encounter the Risen Christ.

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The gospel passage that we just heard today (John 20:19-31) is the continuation of the Easter story. While Mary has already announced, "I have seen the Lord," we have no indication that the disciples believed her.

The disciples had locked the doors to the house in fear... Fear of all that they had witnessed, and fear for their own lives and the persecution that they expected in the aftermath of Jesus' death.

But everything changed for them when Jesus mysteriously entered the house and said to his disciples, **"Peace be with you."** (John 20:19) This was no light-hearted greeting. The Hebrew word for Peace, *shalom*, means much more than its English translation, and offers a deep and abiding sense of harmony and completeness.

"Peace be with you," (John 20:19) he said, a cue to his disciples that something had happened, and he even showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples understood for themselves, saying "We have seen the Lord." (John 20:25)

In that moment, behind the closed doors, the disciples finally caught on to what Mary Magdalene had proclaimed earlier that day.

Except for poor old Thomas who wasn't home when Jesus stopped by.

I have so many questions about Thomas: Where was he that night? And how did he end up being the one wallowing in doubt?

I have no idea what kept Thomas away, but I suspect that we need Thomas' story—even today--because at various moments in our lives, we each *are* Thomas.

Thomases stumbling through life, unable to glimpse sparks of resurrection and the presence of God among us. Particularly when we are living in the throes of change, of grieving on many dimensions.

For me, it's reassuring that these first witnesses to Easter—Mary Magdalene, the other disciples, and eventually Thomas—struggled individually, on their own timelines, to grasp the reality of the Risen Christ.

They wavered between grief and doubt and fear and hope, all mashed up together in its messy humanness. And somehow each emerged to stand with Mary Magdalene, saying, “I have seen the Lord!”

How can we spot resurrection in our world today?

How can we stand on the shoulders of Mary Magdalene who proclaimed, more than 2000 years ago, “I have seen the Lord.”

My favorite contemporary Easter message comes from the mouth of Taylor Swift.

You weren't expecting Taylor Swift to show up in this sermon, were you? Bear with me and my collection of friendship bracelets.

One of my favorite Taylor Swift songs carries for me, a great Easter message.

The song is called “Marjorie.”¹

Taylor released “Marjorie” in 2020 in memory of her late grandmother, Marjorie Finlay, who was an acclaimed opera singer.

In this tribute to her grandmother, she perfectly captures the searing loss and longing that happens when we search, in desperation, for our departed loved ones.

¹ Taylor Swift, “Marjorie.” *Evermore*, Republic Records, 2020.

She conveys the intimacy of her grief when she addresses Marjorie directly. She writes:

I should've asked you questions
I should've asked you how to be
Asked you to write it down for me
Should've kept every grocery store receipt
'Cause every scrap of you would be taken from me
Watched as you signed your name Marjorie²

Hope is always somewhere on the horizon in *Marjorie*, amidst grief and profound loss. In the chorus, she sings:

And if I didn't know better
I'd think you were talking to me now
If I didn't know better
I'd think you were still around³

Like Mary Magdalene, Taylor knows better. Knows her grandmother is gone. Yet she still reaches...reaches for sparks of life.

She sings in the chorus:

What died didn't stay dead
You're alive in my head.⁴

In *Marjorie*, Taylor writes to and about *her* grandmother, but through these lyrics, she writes on behalf of every one of us who has ever grieved after the death of a loved one. And all the unanswered questions...

The line, "you're alive in my head,"⁵ is familiar to us all. But it falls short of resurrection. It's a sort of prelude, isn't it?

But then... wait for it....

² Taylor Swift, "Marjorie." *Evermore*, Republic Records, 2020.

³ Swift, "Marjorie."

⁴ Swift, "Marjorie."

⁵ Swift, "Marjorie."

In the final chorus, Taylor sings: "If I didn't know better, I'd think you were singing with me now,"⁶ at which point Marjorie's recorded voice blends with Taylor's, creating harmony, literally and figuratively. Marjorie Finlay's high notes and Taylor Swift's voice blend in song.

What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, so alive⁷

The last line of *Marjorie* is this:

"I know better/but you're still around"⁸

It's this last line that gets me.

"I know better/but you're still around."

Friends, this is the Easter message. The realization that resurrection is *still around*.

During the Eras Tour, fans created a tradition of turning on their phone flashlights while Taylor sang *Marjorie*. Fans looked out across the stadium, to thousands of lights shimmering while Taylor sang to, and ultimately with her grandmother. **"I know better/but you're still around."**

In that moment, thousands of concertgoers—many in tears singing the words of that final chorus, seemed to search their own grief-stricken places for glimpses, sparks, even the tiniest flickers of resurrection.

Friends, we are people of hope; and even in moments of grief and darkness, we can encounter resurrection.

Just like Mary Magdalene did when she wept outside the tomb.

Just like Taylor Swift does when she sings to and with her grandmother Marjorie.

⁶ Swift, "Marjorie."

⁷ Swift, "Marjorie."

⁸ Swift, "Marjorie."

Preach on, Mary Magdalene...

Preach on, Taylor Swift...

Preach on, all of you... all of us... Yes, I think the words, spoken first by Mary Magdalene, and then later by Taylor Swift, are invitations to *all* of us to probe our world for signs of new life rising up in darkness... for signs that death does not have the final word.

LOVE does. And LOVE lives and moves, mysteriously, across the generations.

If you haven't heard "Marjorie," I encourage you to do so. And while you listen, light a candle and think of someone who has gone before you in this life, and how they offer up continued glimpses of resurrection, even now.

This is our great, *evermore*-unfolding, Easter message.

Amen.