



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter Sunrise
April 5, 2026

Rabboni, Amen!

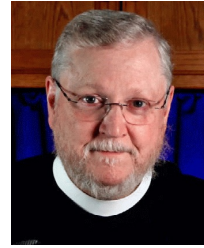
John 20:1–18

¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I do not know where they have laid Him." "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

How it is that Mary could not recognize the Lord Jesus, we can't say. After all, she had traveled with Him from Galilee, and this after Jesus had cast seven demons out of her (Mark 9:16). If that weren't enough, she had also, like the others, left everything to follow



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Him (Luke 8:2; Matthew 19:27). Only three days before, she stood witness to the horrors crucifixion (John 19:25), enduring with Him until the bitter end. Wouldn't the horrors of Golgotha have made it impossible for Mary Magdalene ever to mistake her Lord's identity, even if she were to see Him risen from the dead?

Yet, "she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus." Perhaps it is for us that Mary does not recognize this Man, for here in the Garden, Mary's blindness declares that Jesus' death and resurrection will have no value for you until these divine events are preached to you by the living Word of the living Lord. Mary shows that faith does not come by seeing, but by hearing, and hearing by the Word of the resurrected Christ.

Mary had seen her Lord die, but she still has not grasped the benefits of this death. Without resurrection, Jesus' death is only a death; but with it, He destroys death and gives life. Yet neither His death nor His resurrection will do you any good if they're not preached to you.

So Jesus appears to Mary in the Garden, and with one divine Word He declares His resurrection to her. "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'" With this living Word from the living Lord, joy and faith spring back into the heart that had been deadened by grief and pain. Eyes once blind could see once again. With one Word, Jesus preaches to Mary that death could not hold Him. With one Word, everything came into perspective for her. Faith comes by hearing, not by seeing; faith comes by proclamation not by cognition; faith is a by-product of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

But it must be preached. Jesus' death and resurrection will have no value for you until they're preached to you by the living Word of the living Lord. "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'" Through this preaching – not through her seeing, not through her understanding, not through her ability to make sense of what had just transpired – through this *preaching*, Mary believed.

Through the same divine and living Word from Him who is the true and living Word, you also have believed. If you should go off on some quest to "figure out" the Christian Faith or to find proof for its claims, you will meet the same frustration Mary found when she first came to the garden. You will not find Jesus, just as Mary could not find Him. You will not recognize Him, even if He should come and stand in front of you. "Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'" Through this one-word sermon, Mary believed. Through this sermon, the forgiveness and life that Jesus earned for her on the cross became her own. Through this sermon, Jesus gave to Mary her own place in His resurrection, so that she would never die. On top of all that, with this one-word sermon, Jesus also created within Mary the language of faith. She – by the power of His resurrection – "turned toward



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Him and cried out in Aramaic 'Rabboni!' (which means my Teacher)."

When Mary makes this one-word confession, however, she says much more than "my Teacher!" Essentially, what she's saying is, "It's *You!* You were dead but now *You* live! You've kept *Your Word* and *Your promise!* Rabboni! Everything *You* have said is true!"

Beloved, Mary's "Rabboni" proceeds from the fact and guarantee of Christ's resurrection. Hers is the voice of faith, the voice of recognition, made possible only by the powerful preaching of Christ's resurrection from the dead. On that first Easter, Mary cried out "Rabboni!" On Easter Sunday and on every Lord's Day, the people of God respond by crying out "Amen!"

But don't take your "Amen" lightly, dear friends, for this is your "Rabboni." Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) As surely as the faith of the resurrection was preached to Mary in the garden, so also has it been preached to you. Just as Mary benefited from Christ's death for all sins, so also have you; just as Mary received her incorporation into His resurrection and life, so also have you; just as Mary now stands before God with all sin and guilt eternally removed, so also do you. What else shall you do, but add your "Amen," to her "Rabboni," crying out to your resurrected Lord with the same faith, the same trust, the same joy by which she cried out? What else shall you do, but joyously add your "Yes, Yes, this is and shall be true" to everything that God has now given you in this resurrected Christ? God grant us all a faith like Mary's. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen