3/27/16 *A New Move* John 20:1-18 Deb Winters

I have been a little surprised at the comments I still receive on a sermon I preached in Advent. In it I commented on how every time someone in the Bible sees an angel, the angel has to reassure them by saying, “fear not!” For instance the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night when lo an angel of the Lord appeared to them and said “fear not!” Fear not Zachariah, fear not Mary.

I happened to comment that that leads me to believe that angels don’t look like those cuddly babies we see portrayed in greeting cards. Since then a number of you commented that if you started seeing a baby with wings flying around you, you would be afraid too; you have a point there!

I bring this up because today’s scripture is one of the few where an angel appears and the angel does NOT have to say “fear not”. If you listened carefully to our scripture today you know Mary went early in the morning while it was still dark. It may have been she is a hard worker and normally gets up before the sunrise. It may have been she could not sleep since the crucifixion and all that had happened. Maybe she wanted to travel by night so no one else would know, or maybe it was the guidance of the Holy Spirit that brought her there.

We don’t know because the story does not tell us and yet I still wonder what was she planning on doing? According to the Gospel of John she goes alone and she knows there is a stone rolled over the tomb where they put the body of Jesus, one she could not on her own roll away. Maybe in her grief she just wanted to be near him? After all Mary Magdalene is the one Dan Brown in his book , *The Da Vinci Code*, theorized marry Jesus and had children with him.

We don’t know why she went, but the text tells us when she got there the stone was already rolled away. It never says she went in or looked, but rather immediately ran to the only people in her grief she knew to run to, Simon Peter and the beloved disciple most scholars believe is John. They ran back and saw the stone was rolled away, just as Mary had said and they went in and saw that the body was gone and the grave cloths left in the tomb.

When they leave, Mary stays weeping outside the tomb and in her grieving looks in the tomb and sees not one but two angels! Neither one of them has to say to her, “fear not!” My theory on that is because at this point, when Mary found her beloved Lord’s body gone she had hit rock bottom. Ever been there? Ever been either so down or so angry you didn’t care what happened to yourself? It’s a dangerous place to be for that is when we react without thinking or caring. Mary no longer cared about herself; she was only focused on recovering the body of Jesus.

The angels ask her why she is crying and she tells them flat out, “they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him.” She assumes the body has been stolen and then the real almost comic irony of the story begins. She turns around and the very body she is looking for is standing in front of her. If she is so desperately looking for Jesus, why doesn’t she recognize him?

We don’t really know, but there are a couple of theories. The text tells us she is weeping and it is hard to see anything clearly as tears are streaming from your eyes. She is also not the only one who does not recognize Jesus right away according to the other Gospel accounts so some scholars question whether although recognizable in our resurrection bodies for we know Jesus still bore the marks of the holes in his hands and feet and side, there is something different about us. Or, it could be you just don’t really expect to meet someone after they have died unless they look like a mummy. Or maybe it was her own focus because you see she was already stuck in the past. Her focus was still on the tomb, not on the future.

Jesus asked her why she is weeping and who is she looking for and then she asked Jesus where his own body is! Jesus simply says her name and like most of us when a loved one simply says our name, we know who it is just by the way they say it. I love that age 95 even though his memory is starting to go, when I call my Dad and I simply say, “Hi Dad”, he still knows exactly which child is calling.

Then it’s interesting how some of the different biblical versions translate this, for the Greek word used is *haptomai* which means more than just to touch, it means to cling. Modern day scholars now interpret this to mean she was clinging to Jesus and she was not letting go, which is exactly what I would do, I’d hold on for dear life and never let go! Jesus has to tell her, Mary, stop clinging to me, meaning it’s OK, I’m here, I’m alive, let go of the past and head into the future. Go and tell my brothers I’m alive and I’m ascending to God.

What are you still clinging to today? What is it you have to let go of? What in your past have you not gotten over, are you still holding onto? This sermon ends for Marcia and I the series we’ve been preaching entitled, “When Newness Comes.” It is a series we choose to help you prepare for your new pastor. It is time not to cling to the past, but rather to build upon it, and look to the future God is calling you to.

I like to think of it this way: There is a story about a painting called “Checkmate” that used to hang in a museum, it is now privately owned. The painting is about Satan and the fictional character Faust who sold his soul to the devil. They are playing a game of chess. In the picture Satan has a smirk on his face as if he has won while Faust has his head in his hand as if the game is lost. As the story goes one day a chess master was walking through the museum when the painting caught his eye.

He stopped to look at it and realized there was something wrong with the painting for he took a step closer and then yelled out, “It’s a lie! It’s a lie! The king and the rook have one more move!” When I think of Easter, in my own mind that is always what I think about. No matter how tough life gets or how focused on the past I get, or when I’ve painted myself into a corner, God’s always got one more move.

Have you been given a diagnosis that overwhelms you? Remember, God’s got one more move.

In a dead-end job you hate and think there is no way out? Remember, God’s got one more move.

In a relationship that is dying and you see no hope for? Remember, God’s got…

Think you are too old and there is no more purpose in your life? Remember, God’s got…

Think you’re too young and no one will listen to you? Remember, God’s got…

In debt up to your ears you will be paying down the rest of your life? Remember, God’s got…

You or a loved one caught in an addiction that is slowly killing you? Remember, God’s got…

Unsure of your future, which to you doesn’t look too bright? Remember, God’s got…

Think this church is dead and there is no future for it? Remember, God’s got…

When you close your eyes to this world and open to a world the Bible tells us no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor human imagination envisions it is then you will really understand God has always got, ONE MORE MOVE! Amen.