

**Text:** [John 20:1-18 \(CEB\)](#)  
**Date:** April 5, 2026 – Easter Sunday  
**Title:** “Easter Faith: From Me to We”  
**Theme:** Easter faith moves us from faith in a God of “me” to a God of “we.”

## 1

Easter, like Christmas, is one of those holidays where family traditions change dramatically as kids get older  
Maybe you felt a little sad when you stopped dyeing eggs together as a family  
Or stopped doing an egg hunt

Life is full of these transitions  
Moments when we re-negotiate relationships

Our oldest turned 21 this year, and she’s been studying abroad in Europe this semester  
To watch her navigate that adventure with minimal help has been a tremendous source of pride for me as a father  
Those are the good times, right?

Other times, there are harder things to negotiate  
Like when you first realize *you’re* parenting your parent  
And having to make uncomfortable decisions on their behalf

Our relationships don’t stay fixed  
We grow and we change  
We negotiate and we re-negotiate how we’re going to be together

Sometimes because we’ve changed,  
sometimes because someone else has,  
sometimes because circumstances have

## 2

I wonder if something like that is happening in the Easter story  
A kind of re-negotiation of the relationship between Jesus and his  
followers

The Resurrection moves them from a faith that feels very  
personal to something much much bigger

Mary Magdalene is such an important figure among the disciples  
In every gospel she is said to be ONE of the first – if not THE first  
– to come upon the empty tomb  
She's the first to carry the good news about the Resurrection

Now, the everything is confusing at first –  
The empty tomb doesn't feel like good news  
No one knows for sure how to interpret what they're seeing

And Mary, who it's clear has been *close* with Jesus *throughout* his  
ministry  
Is absolutely *crushed* by the fact that his body is missing

So when she returns to the tomb with the disciples  
She stays there  
Because she just can't leave – she doesn't know what else to do

She first encounters the angels who want to know why she's  
crying,  
And then she turns around to see...someone else

It's Jesus, but she doesn't KNOW it's Jesus  
Which is so strange, because she KNOWS him  
Of *course* she knows him – she's spent years with him

And so that's our first clue that something *different* is happening  
here  
That Resurrection is something that means more than a body  
alive again  
The fact that she doesn't know him until he speaks her name says  
something is different about the risen Jesus

Now what Jesus says next has always confused me  
Depending on the translation you read, he says:  
"Don't hold on to me"  
Or "Don't cling to me"  
Or even "Don't *touch* me"  
And I've always wondered why that was  
So odd for that to be the first thing you say  
when you're risen from the dead, isn't it?

### 3

But one of my favorite theologians, Father Richard Rohr<sup>1</sup>  
Has a theory: that Jesus is re-negotiating the relationship with  
Mary – and through her, all of us – in that moment

Mary knew Jesus as Jesus  
He was the very human teacher who loved his friends  
Who sat down to meals with them  
Who touched the sick and healed them  
Who taught them all how to pray

This was Mary's Jesus, the one who she loved  
The one who she grieved  
The one who had done so much for her  
Who the scripture says cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:1-2)  
And now here he was saying, "don't hold on to me"?

This is the moment, Fr. Richard says, when Jesus needs to re-  
negotiate the relationship  
Because the Risen Jesus is no longer the Jesus Mary once knew

He's no longer Jesus of Nazareth  
He's become *Jesus the Christ*

Now that seems kind of abstract, I know  
But his point is this:  
Before Easter, individuals had a relationship with Jesus, the MAN  
After Easter, the whole world is offered a relationship with the  
Risen Christ, the Son of God

He's not just for Mary anymore  
Not just for Peter  
Not just for the Twelve  
Not just for those who lived in Galilee or Jerusalem  
But for EVERYONE

Suddenly the risen Christ is roaming loose in the world,  
free to show up **whenever** and **wherever**  
and to **whomever** he pleases  
And throughout the New Testament, he DOES exactly that!

At that moment in the Garden, he's saying to Mary, "you knew me  
this way"  
And I was with you  
I was for you, and I loved you THAT WAY

Now I'm still with you,  
I'm still for you,  
And I still love you – that doesn't change  
But there's so much more now

The church has done a pretty good job of convincing people that  
they need a personal relationship with Jesus  
Even if we haven't always done a good job of actually giving them  
the tools for it

If we came here this morning with any faith at all  
We probably have in our minds the notion that Jesus loves us  
That he wants the best for us  
That we can pray to him for the things we need

Jesus is very personal to us that way  
We may have stories of how our prayers have been answered  
How he's been with us in hard times  
Not all that much different from the way that Mary knew him

But this personal relationship can also be tricky at times  
I remember having a tense conversation with someone in one of  
my churches, many years ago  
Where she kept saying, "MY God says...", "MY God does..."  
Everything she said was like that – so very personal  
"My God...my God...my God..."

And some of the things she was saying weren't making a lot of  
sense to me theologically or biblically  
HER God seemed to love & care for only a narrow band of people  
And I couldn't help thinking that if I drew a Venn diagram of the  
people SHE loved  
and the ones HER God loved, it would be the exact same circle  
HER God seemed really, really, really small to me

Now we know we can do that to *people*  
We can keep them small by not giving them freedom to be who  
they are

We also know that if we keep loving our 21-year-olds the way we  
loved them as 5-year-olds  
That it's not going to turn out well for anybody

And that's why, from time to time, we have to re-negotiate our  
relationships  
The year comes when you don't go to get their pictures with the  
Easter Bunny anymore – they're past it

## 5

And I feel like what's true with people is also true with Jesus  
We all want a very personal Jesus – who is for ME  
Who will share my views on everything  
Who will reinforce all my beliefs and biases about what's right and  
what's wrong

Who will love ME  
and care for ME  
and look out for ME  
and FORGIVE me  
And eventually will RECEIVE me into eternal life

Now Easter means that – absolutely  
But if that's ALL it means, we've missed something important  
>>Easter is meant to move us from a faith that's about "me" to a  
faith that's about "we"

Jesus is for us, absolutely  
Each of us in a very personal way  
But through his Resurrection, he became so much more

There is NO place where he's not at work  
There is NO one who is beyond his reach  
NO one who is beyond his care

And no one who is beyond his presence  
EVER – no matter what  
He is always with us

## 6

There's a famous story that's told about Helen Keller  
Who was born deaf and blind in 1880,  
but who through persistence and the work of some very faithful  
teachers,  
learned to read and write and communicate –  
to the point where she could, remarkably, even give public  
lectures  
It's said that when she was first told about Jesus,  
her response was:  
"I always knew he was there, but I didn't know his name."

Friends, that's the risen Christ  
Universal, BEYOND place and time  
Everywhere humans have ever found themselves or ever will find  
themselves

>>We could be talking about Artemis II, on the way to the moon,

In Iran or  
In Gaza

In an ICE detention facility or  
In a prison

In the penthouse or  
In a homeless shelter

Christ is THERE. Because he is risen.

You're not out of reach...no one is  
You may have walked in here this morning feeling like you are  
beyond the reach of Christ  
But you are not

7

Jesus saying "don't hold on to me" isn't about him not caring  
It's about him caring more and more  
for more and more people

This is the good news  
That we worship a Christ who is as big as the whole world – the  
whole universe, even!

Who loves you more than you could ever imagine  
And who also loves *your neighbor* more than you could ever  
imagine  
Even that neighbor that you absolutely cannot stand!

And if that challenges you today – well, then good!  
It's meant to

>>If the Jesus you know isn't big enough to love every single  
person on this planet,  
then your picture of the RISEN Christ is still too small

Easter means we can no longer worship a tiny God who is just for  
me

Who can be confined inside the circle of MY understanding, MY  
tribe, MY opinions, MY politics

In Easter, God was renegotiating the relationship  
Mary just wanted her Jesus back  
But he had something bigger in mind:  
Moving us from “me” faith to “we” faith

And we needed that  
Just like little kids who at first can't see much beyond themselves  
A mature and growing faith means recognizing

That the risen Christ doesn't just show up for us  
He shows up for everybody  
For the lonely  
For the forgotten  
For those who don't feel like they belong  
And that means WE need to show up too

Not with the kind of love that's confined to our people, our circle  
But with Christ's love  
The kind that reaches beyond “me”  
To become “we”

Let us pray....

**By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**

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<sup>1</sup> This is from Rohr's excellent book *The Universal Christ*.