

Be a PEEP John 20:1-18

Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Easter (March 27) 2016

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.

Paul, Jack, and Marguerite had known one another since elementary school days. They were like the Three Musketeers– without a D’Artagnan to complicate things. They had all grown up within three blocks of one another; their parents had all worked together at the same Photocopier Giant corporation, which had caused them to be moved eventually to Tucson, where they began their families – with children Paul, Jack, and Marguerite.

Paul was a natural leader – often headstrong and off-like-a-rocket on whatever the next project was. He didn’t always think before speaking, but he was definitely a “play-by-the-rules kind of guy.” Paul might be attracted to the splendor of a new idea, but he was not one who would get on board until he knew that he could be comfortable operating within the ground rules of whatever the game was. He was a loyal TEAM player.

Jack, on the other hand, was the quiet one. His soft spoken demeanor quickly earned him the friendship of others. His penchant for deep thinking also made him the go-to-guy for trying to problem solve.

Both Jack and Paul were used to the great outdoors, having spent much of their childhood playing outside whenever possible. And – as to be expected from close friends, who played a lot – they were very

competitive. The first day that Marguerite met them, Paul and Jack were fishing side-by-side in a little trickle of a stream. They had been there for about 1-1/2 hours, when Marguerite rode up on her bicycle. She stopped, and called out, “How’s the fishing going?”

To this, Paul pulled out a stringer from the water with one scrawny 5 inch sunfish, stuck through the gill. **“I’ve won the first three of five bets won so far: (1) Most Caught, (2) First Caught, (3) and Largest caught.”**

“Yeah, but…” interrupted Jack, **“You should have seen the one that got away off my line. I’ll win all five bets when I catch him again!”**

Marguerite simply rolled her eyes and got back on her bicycle to pedal away. But, over the years, she joined in with them in almost all their escapades, even if she weren’t quite so competitive. They, actually (without intending to do so) ended up participating in many of the same school activities through high school, and now – even though they had completely different aspirations in life, were all now seniors in the same university.

It was a long weekend, when most students left campus for home. But Paul, Jack and Marguerite had all stayed on campus. They decided on Friday morning to go for a hike in some fairly rough wilderness about 8 miles away from the campus. They didn’t tell anyone where they were going, because there was no one on campus who would be expecting them. And they didn’t bother telling anyone at their respective homes three hours away, for they would only be gone for the day. It wasn’t a problem – unless of course something went wrong and they didn’t make it back on campus that night ... or the next – because no one would miss them.

It started out as a great trek through some really beautiful scrub and unusual foliage. After eating a packed lunch, they ascended a mountain, and the heat of the day became more than they anticipated. They sought some shelter from the midday heat, and found a little wooded valley that seemed idyllic in its lush grass and wildflowers. As they went further into the valley, they discovered the little creekbed which had once held the river which had cut the valley from the rocky walls surrounding them.

As the sun began to descend from its apex, Marguerite suggested that they begin to plan their return to campus. **“Do you want to go back the same way we came, or use our dead reckoning to follow the valley back around the mountain to campus?”**

Paul favored the more adventuresome “dead reckoning” idea. Jack was content to just go along and soak in the beauty. It wasn’t long after that when they felt the air suddenly cool, with the darkening of the sky, and a few minutes later, came the crack of thunder. Just about the time Marguerite was going to suggest that they simply turn and retrace their steps, the ground underneath her hiking boots began to give way.

As she turned to move to safer ground, she realized that she couldn’t. It was like a hole was opening in the ground underneath her and this hole was growing, like she was being swallowed. Paul and Jack were soon caught in the ever increasing emptiness beneath them, and they all began to slide downward.

But the time the ground stop moving, they found themselves at the bottom of a sudden cave, through which a river was flowing. There were steep, almost vertical walls all around them – about 15-20 feet tall. The cloudy skies above gave way to a thunderstorm. Within just a few minutes, the reality began

to sink in: they were trapped in a cave with no exit except straight up and the river at their feet was quickly rising up their legs.

After about an hour, the rain stopped, but -- by then -- all three hikers realized that they were in quite a predicament. The water was now thigh high on them. There was no way out of this cave; and it was getting dark. They had no food and no way to let anyone know where they were. There was no way they could sit or lie down without drowning, and no way to climb out.

As they considered their plight, each had different ideas. **Paul** said that he knew that they had to be within the bounds of a national park. He knew that the park rangers would have their regular patrol routes. He assured them that the protocol of park rangers would not fail them. They would be discovered. He was not worried.

Jack wasn't so sure about the park ranger idea. But, Jack believed. Whatever situation Jack was in; he never lost his cool, because he was a believer. When asked what he believed, he was always a little bit vague, but his lack of clarity did not dampen the enthusiasm of his faith. He simply believed and that was all he needed.

Meanwhile, **Marguerite** could feel a sense of despair starting to well up within her. Paul believed that the rangers would come, and Jack simply believed. But she was getting scared. As the light continued to drain from the sky, and no stars appeared above them, the thoughts of a soggy night without sleep made her wish that they had let someone know where they were going. No one would miss them at all before Sunday night – and that was 48 hours away. They might not miss them enough to even look for them until sometime on Monday. She knew that she could not simply stand, without food or sleep for that long. She was cold. She was frightened.

All through that night, Paul kept ruminating about what he knew about the national park system and how well the park ranger system worked. Jack could be heard humming hymn tunes. Marguerite was afraid to speak her fears. She could not appear to be weak; she was the only woman there. Behind their spoken faith statement, both Paul and Jack knew that they could not allow their macho façade to crack.

By 10:00 the next morning, it seemed like maybe the sun might enliven their hopes, but it began to rain again. The water was soon up to their waists. And then they heard a voice coming through the rainfall, “Marguerite! Marguerite!”

They had no idea who it was, but they didn't care. All three of them began to cry out as best as their cracked dry voices would allow.

Two hours later, all three were in the emergency room of the university hospital– being checked out. Apparently they were going to be alright – certainly after a good meal and a good sleep in a dry bed. And all three of them were so grateful for **Joshua, Marguerite's covenant prayer partner**, who had come by her dorm room the night before to pray with her. When he had not been able to get in touch with her anytime that night, he remembered that she had said she wanted to explore this part of the national park. He had not been able to rouse anyone else on the nearly empty campus to help him, so he had mounted a one man search party, until he found them. He wasn't going to give up until he knew that she was safe. **Maybe they needed that D'Artagnan after all!**

Paul and Jack and Marguerite were a little bit like Peter, John and Mary in the Easter story in John's Gospel.

Peter and John had this competitive thing – even in the midst of their grief for their crucified friend, they had a foot race to the tomb, **Peter** (like Paul in today's story) was just who he was: a company man: "Just the facts, Ma'am. Just the facts." **Hmmm. Body is missing. Body linen folded up here. Face linen folded up – over there. Check, check, check. Got it. Let's go home.**

People with this kind of resurrection experience today didn't have the privilege to visit the tomb on that first Easter to observe the facts. And since there aren't any facts in their repertoire of daily living, like the empty tomb of resurrection, they just rely on what they have been told are the facts. They rely upon the doctrines of the church. Just the facts that they have been taught to believe.

John, on the other hand – John the emotional one, like Jack in the lost-in-the-wilderness-story – he just believed. Scripture tells us that he didn't know what to believe. But that didn't matter. He just believed -- and it felt good -- and that was enough for him.

Mary – like Marguerite in the college-students-story – Mary was all about the **personal relationship with Jesus**. **Peter's facts**, and **John's blind faith** weren't enough for Mary. She simply was not going to leave the empty tomb until she sorted it all out. She didn't get it, and so she just stayed, until she had a **personal encounter** with Jesus, the Jesus who had risen from the dead. And, like Marguerite in the story – **it was that personal relationship that saved her.**

I'm going to guess that today, here in this sanctuary, we've got Peters, Johns and Marys. There is this resurrection thing we all celebrate on Easter Sunday.

Some of us are like Peter – just tell me the doctrines and that’s what I’ll hold onto. The Peters trust the church to have figured it all out -- and that’s **all they need ... at least for now**.

And the **Johns of our congregation** don’t care so much about the specifics of the doctrines; they just believe. That’s good enough. Just believe; It feels right inside, and that’s **all they need ... at least for now**.

And then there are some – like **Mary** – who have somewhere along the line become a **PEEP**.

You know those little brightly colored, sugar-laden, marshmallow candy chicks or rabbits or ducks that have been appearing only at Easter, since 1953. They’re called **PEEPs**. Why are they called that?

I think they are called **PEEPs** to remind us that -- like Mary -- it’s possible to be a **Personal Experience Easter Person. A **PEEP****

We all come to Easter in different ways and in different stages of our faith journey. And, in the fullness of time, when we are ready, **Jesus comes to us**

- not just as a candy extravaganza in a children’s Easter egg hunt,
- not just as the object of a doctrine; and
- not just as the basis of some fuzzy-feel-good faith emotion.

Each one of which is a good thing in its own time – it gives us hope that there really is something better ... that whenever we come up against what feels like a dead end – the God of resurrection / the God of Surprises / always has another way.

But – when we are ready, and when God chooses, the Resurrected Lord will come and make a **PEEP** out of you – a **Personal Experience Easter Person**. And when that happens, there is the blessed peace that passes all understanding, and it will empower you to share that **PEEP** power with others.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.