

Sermon :: 05-Apr-2026
Easter Day, Year A

“ Jesus said to her,
‘Mary.’ ”

My heart was in my mouth as I made my way to the partner’s office to tell her the terrible news. I’d been a lawyer for less than six months ... and *now* I didn’t think I was likely to make the one-year mark.

As I walked into Marsha’s office and sat down, she could tell something was very wrong; she told me to just *say* it, so I did: I’d been the most-junior associate working on a large deal the firm was handling, and one of my responsibilities was tending to the small mountain of paperwork required to register the transaction in nine or ten different states.¹ Somehow, I’d just discovered, I had let the filings for the State of New York, where a majority of the new investors lived, fall off my to-do list: I’d never submitted *any* of the required documents. So now, our client had made *dozens* of (technically) illegal stock sales there ... to the tune of several *million* dollars. I was *beyond* chagrined or apologetic: I was *morose*, as I pondered the adverse consequences not only for our *client* ... but also for my *career*.

After hearing my confession, Marsha paused a moment ... leaned forward a bit ... folded her hands on the desk in front of her ... looked me in the eye ... and said ... “Relax.” *What?* Did I hear her *correctly*? “Relax”? “Relax,” she said again. “No one’s going to jail for this.² It was an innocent mistake, and I’m *positive* there’s a way to rectify it. Now, go hit the books³ and find out how.”

And so, I learned an important lesson in the law: There is almost *always* a *SECOND CHANCE*. Almost *always* a *do-over* ... another bite at the *apple* ... an opportunity to make *right* what you *failed* at ... or didn’t *complete* ... the *first* time. For Marsha was correct: The laws in New York *did* afford screw-ups like me a *SECOND CHANCE*. And when I discovered how, in *my* particular case ... I don’t think there was a more-*relieved* lawyer within a thousand miles.

**

We can’t, of course, *know* what was going through (St) Mary Magdalene’s mind as she made her way to Jesus’ Tomb that first Easter morning ... but it’s not hard to *imagine* her thoughts being like those of a trembling young associate making his dreaded way to the partner’s office: *Something—everything—has gone terribly, terribly wrong ... and now, who knows how to put any of it back together again?!* Jesus—the Messiah—is *dead*. The disciples—His appointed ‘successors’—have *scattered*.⁴ And now, Mary comes to find out ... even Jesus’ *body* is missing! Truly, an awful, awful

¹ For those in-the-know, these are so-called ‘blue sky laws.’ While this transaction (a “private placement”) lay outside the SEC’s securities registration scheme, we still needed to comply with the securities laws of each state in which an investor resided.

² These were her actual words. I have never, ever forgotten them; and whenever I bungle something (and how often that is!), they come back to me as a source of perspective and comfort.

³ And they were literally *books*, back in those days!

⁴ The Gospel according to St John doesn’t report this in so many words (as do Mark and Matthew), but after Jesus’ arrest in the garden, no disciples other than Peter (Simon) and John (the disciple whom Jesus loved) are mentioned in John until after the Resurrection.

end to what ... just one short *week* ago ... had been such a *promising* beginning, at the gates of Jerusalem.

And then ... in the midst of all Mary's fear and anguish ... Jesus, Who's been looking on, pauses a moment ... leans forward a bit ... folds His hands in front of Him ... looks her in the eye... and says ... "Mary:" ¶*Mary*, I am not dead, but *alive*. ¶*Mary*, I am not gone away, but right *here*. ¶*Mary*, I have not forsaken you, but am so close—so solid—so *real*—so *available*—you could *touch* Me, *Mary*.

And in that "*Mary*" ... I hear "*Relax*." For Easter-Jesus gives us a *SECOND CHANCE* ... a *do-over* ... another bite at the *apple* (no Adam-and-Eve pun intended!⁵) ... an opportunity to make *right* what we *failed* at ... or didn't *complete* ... or that just went plain *wrong* ... the *first* time.

- Jesus' *Death* is very real ... incredibly painful ... supremely sacrificial ... and also, a *SECOND CHANCE* for us: Jesus dies on the Cross ... as we die, symbolically, in the waters of Baptism ... to forgive ... release ... atone for ... expunge ... all our sins—yes, *all* of them.⁶ We should, of course, *never cease striving* to live as good and loving a life as we can, and to repair the harm we do. But *when* we screw up ... as *often* as we screw up ... as *monumentally* as we screw up ... because of the *Cross*, God will *never* abandon, disown or give up on us ... but will always—*always*—give us a *SECOND CHANCE*.
- Jesus' *Resurrection* is a surprise ... a delight ... a miracle ... a victory of God's good over everything in this world that would oppose God ... and also, a *SECOND CHANCE* for us: Jesus rises again from the Tomb ... as we rise again, symbolically, from the waters of Baptism ... to *reset* our *existence* ... *raise* us to a new *state* ... *give* us a *new life*, in Him. No longer are we constrained—or condemned—to muddle through this life forever at a distance or remove *from* God ... always in some wobbly, imperfect orbit *around* God ... but *now*, in God, *Godself*. In His Resurrection, Jesus graciously extends the hand of God to *every* human creature and says, "Welcome. Fear not. Be *with* Me. Be *in* Me. Be *of* Me." >> For *this* life ... this narrow (*square gesture*), tight, burdened, bumptious little *human* life: this life of addictions and arguments; of bills and battles; of egos and emergencies; of illnesses and inequalities; of politics and plagues; of worry and war ... is *not—not!*—all that God intends for us. No! From the threshold of the Empty Tomb, Easter-Jesus calls each *one* of us, by *name*, and invites us into *another* life ... a *second* life ... a *SECOND CHANCE*-life: the very *divine* life ... the very *holy* life ... the very *blessed* life of God ... *even* as we slog our way through the *first* life of *this* world.
- And, finally, the *Ascension* that Jesus tells Mary He will soon make into Heaven ... "to *My* Father and *your* Father, to *My* God and *your* God"—note the double-possessives! ... is the capstone ... the climax ... the conclusion ... of *all* that God would *ever* have for humanity ... and also, a *cosmic SECOND CHANCE* for us: For Jesus will ascend into Heaven ¶to make a *place* for us—an *eternal* place—there; ¶to set a *table* for us—a *bountiful, boundless* table—in His glorious presence; ¶to open His arms—His *infinite, loving, gracious* arms—for us to dwell in ... with all who have gone on before us ... *forever*. For Easter-Jesus leaves us on Ascension Day *not* in any way '*behind*' ... but rather, goes on *ahead*, to make

⁵ Or indeed, perhaps the (unavoidable) pun is the very *point* of *Easter!*

⁶ I am not suggesting this is the *only* reason He died, but I firmly believe it was one of them.

ready for us our welcome in Heaven: our *ultimate* ... our *full and final* ... SECOND CHANCE ... that fulfills God's destiny for us, once-and-for-all.

**

When I went back to Marsha's office a few hours *later*, that fateful day, and told her I'd discovered how to correct my mistake ... she said, "Good! I *knew* there'd be a SECOND CHANCE. Now, go *do* it."

When we, like Mary Magdalene, come to Easter-Jesus, feeling lonely or abandoned ... burdened or guilty ... despondent or hopeless ... unsure or unbelieving ... He not only *knows* there's a SECOND CHANCE for us ... but He *is* it. And looking right at us, Easter-Jesus says, "Good! I *AM* your SECOND CHANCE. Now, go *embrace* it!"

THE REV DOUGLAS S WORTHINGTON
All Souls' Episcopal Church
San Diego, CA

© 2026 Douglas S Worthington, all rights reserved