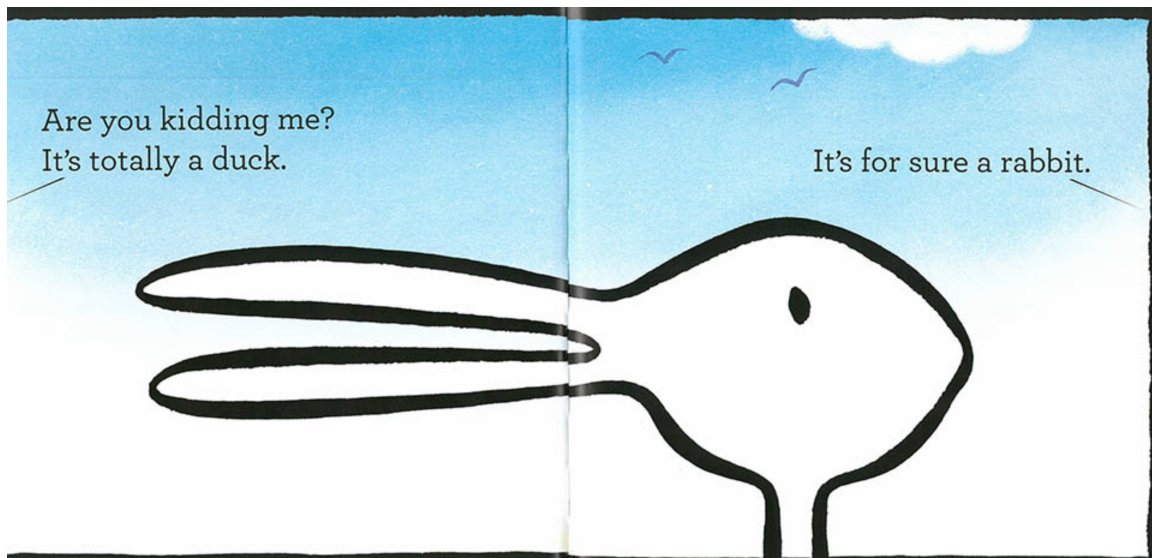


**Mary Magdalene Sermon  
West Valley Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann**

RABBIT OR DUCK

Perhaps some of you are familiar with this children's book that is actually a book on perception...



This book teaches us in a very simple way that the exact same thing can be seen or interpreted in a completely different way – depending upon how you look at it.

Now I can have my perspective on things and give it a certain meaning - duck

And you can have your perspective on things and give it a certain meaning - rabbit

But every so often we get bowled off of our feet with God's perspective on things – and his meaning for the line drawing of our life  
And it blows our minds every time – because the human tendency is to always think that our perception of reality is the accurate one

And our God always surprises us with a new way of looking at things  
Some people call it conversion – conversion in the most basic sense of  
the world means a turning around to see things in a different way

That’s what the scripture is about today...

We are in a series called ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS written by Tim  
Keller and today Keller talks about a favorite passage of mine in  
scripture – one that we usually read at Easter. It is the story of Mary  
Magdalene coming to the empty tomb.

As I read this scripture I remembered that this was the first scripture  
text that I ever wrote about that actually got published – it was in some  
Presbyterian thing that is now out of print – I think it might have been  
called MONDAY MORNING – I got \$10 for it and waved it in front of some  
peoples faces....and the article I titled it “TURN AROUND MARY”

Because I had been reading this scripture and it suddenly occurred to  
me as I was reading it that Mary was standing at the tomb looking for,  
expecting to find  
ready to anoint and prepare for burial  
a dead Jesus!!

She has her mind on death, she is perceiving that all of the  
circumstances point to death and loss - as most of us would, if we had  
been through the harrowing ordeal of witnessing a crucifixion less than  
48 hours before. I admire Mary Magdalene's courage – going to the  
tomb to begin with. Risking her safety as she would then be associated  
with Jesus and seen as one who was his follower.

Yet the events of the past hours had left her shaken and pulled down by  
despair – a frequent experience for many of us when we lose a loved  
one.

So what happens? Well...let me say it again

Her perception when she can’t find Jesus’ body is created by lenses that  
spell despair.

She interprets those circumstances through the lens of loss and death.  
Someone had stolen his body away – NOT – Oh Wow! He must be alive  
then....how great.

To think about life, instead of death was so completely foreign to her, that when Jesus came to her she doesn't even recognize him.

She is focused so much on death that when life encounters her she can't see it at first. She is looking at the circumstances through her own lens of despair – instead of looking at those same circumstances through the lens of hope, resurrection, victory...

Now it isn't really fair for us to criticize Mary too much. Mary Magdalene as Keller puts it is actually the first Christian ever because, according to John, she is the first one to ever realize see and experience the living Christ. To have any concept, any awareness of what the resurrection was – was unheard of before this - she is the first one.

How hard it is to see a rabbit...if all you've ever seen is a duck...and you have no idea what a rabbit is...lets say.

That's Mary Magdalene's predicament.

Its tough sometimes to look at things – the line drawing of our circumstances, what's wrong with the world, with the lenses of faith... cause we aren't sure what that's supposed to be. That's why the lenses of faith really are a gift of the Holy Spirit.

But because we know the end of the story from our vantage we might want to go up to Mary and physically grab her and say *“Look! Turn Around! Don't you see who is addressing you? It's the One you have been looking for. Your circumstances haven't changed – it's the same circumstances but they point to an entirely different picture. Jesus is alive, not dead! ....You are looking for him in the wrong way – don't look for a corpse – look for a living, breathing, reality who calls you by name! Look at him! He's real, he's right there! He is trying to talk to you.”*

I think I was probably talking to myself, that day, as I talked to Mary – identifying with her – telling myself to see my own circumstances through the lenses of the Holy Spirit – (I was kind of struggling with a lot of pressure at the time) get a little more faith, Kim. Jesus is alive for you. Don't despair.

**The very line drawing of a circumstance that spells despair...looked at the through lenses of faith... spells hope and victory.**

**The lenses of faith create an entirely different picture of the exact same thing.**

Who wears contacts here?

I do, and lose them all the time.

The other day I lost one in the middle of a talk I was giving.

It just popped right out of my eye. (I had glasses...OK)

I am telling you when I don't have my contacts on, I can't see a thing

The world is a blur

– there's nothing more frustrating. I turned 50 – BAM it happened

Talk about despair. I can't participate in life

I put those lenses on though...and all of a sudden I can see! *See the way I am supposed to see.*

“I see said the blind man as he took up his hammer and saw”

That's me when I put on those contact lenses.

In the same way – its easy to lose those lenses of faith that help us to perceive things the way God perceives them.

We can easily get blurred up in our faith walk –

As I said...that ability to turn around and see Jesus is the process we call conversion – and it doesn't happen just once – although the first time we ask Jesus into our hearts is critical

But **regularly we need those turning around points where we see Jesus** again and again– because this world is such a dark place - we can start bumping around in it like someone without their contact lenses on.

We need regular conversions – these point where we turn to see Jesus in a new way and get inspired by him – reminding ourselves again and again that “Oh yes...you are alive and right here calling my name”....Those turning around experiences help us see the line drawing of our lives in a whole new way.

Today we had three people join and one get baptized – Christina and Joe and Erik. Their stories are far more deep and meaningful than what I can share here today.

But for all of them they had a turning around – two more gradual, one more sudden...where they recognized again...Jesus in their lives in a whole new way.

Christina said "I knew the Lord was alive when he carried me many times at the lowest points in my life when I couldn't carry myself. He never left me.

*Joe wrote: Looking back at my life I can clearly see that he (Jesus) has always been there with me. Walking beside me most of the time and carrying me when I had given up....but for awhile I fell into a dark haze and verbally challenged his existence. I asked him to show up for me and he did...I now see daily his presence through prayer. The more I pray the more clearly I see and feel his presence.*

Today is Pentecost friends – which is the birthday of the church. And It is these kinds of experiences that make up the fabric of what the church is all about. Seeing Jesus, knowing that he is there, recognizing him calling you and carrying you at the lowest times.

That's why I love ministry – I love to see people turn around, as God gives them lenses of faith to see what they've never seen before...there is nothing like that! To see perspectives change and the exact same circumstances that caused despair before bring hope...

When we perceive what is going on with our life using the lenses of faith ...3 things always happen

- 1. We recognize God's presence with us**

When we perceive our life circumstances through the lenses of faith we will always recognize some how in some way God's presence with us  
You heard it in the testimonies!

There will be a deep sense in us that we do not travel alone on this journey, or through this circumstance. We will perceive that we are being held and guided, and directed and taken care of, even in the worst cases.

Sometimes we need a wake up call, just like when Jesus called out “MARY” using her name...saying hey...turn around...I am not just the gardener or an arbitrary person you can ignore. I am the living victorious Christ at your side!!

Mary answers and says “Rabboni” which means teacher...cause he is teaching her right there that he is with her, always, forever, and ever. So ask yourself..

**Where is God saying “turn around” to me today so that I can recognize Jesus in my life again in a whole new or for the very first time?**

The second thing that always happens when we put on faith lenses is that

## **2. We become hopeful people**

Despair and discouragement are always of the enemy – not of God. (2X)  
The God of Jesus Christ is always, and will always be a God who brings us hope.

Jesus says to Mary “Why do you weep?”

Maybe he is asking you that same question today, assuring you that what you see as hopeless, or a dead end – he sees as hopeful and full of possibilities

When Mary recognizes Jesus as alive, not dead, she turns her weeping to praise “My Lord and My God”

Seeing our circumstances through the lenses of faith always brings hope...

The third certain thing that always happens is that

## **3. We receive a calling for this life**

When we see our lives through the lenses of faith we become aware that there is a mission, a purpose to our lives that is always bigger than

ourselves. ***We are called to follow and proclaim, not just sit there and be lame.*** (as someone in one of my youth groups once said to me)

**Mary Magdalene's call was "Go and tell... what you have seen and heard."**

Friends, victory, joy, new possibilities, a future and a hope always characterize the Divine perspective. The very same circumstances that may be a line drawing of defeat for us...God sees those very same circumstances as a line drawing of victory.

What was Jesus' calling?

Jesus calling was the cross...

Hebrews has these words about Jesus "For the joy set before him (Jesus) **endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

[Hebrews 12:1-3](#)

For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross.

**The lenses of faith brought Jesus joy, even as he endured the pain.**

That's what got him through! And the cross once a symbol of pain, is now a symbol of healing and forgiveness for us all. I believe that's how Jesus perceived the cross as he suffered through it; he had had God's perspective – the lenses of faith. The very same contours of the cross now mean victory for every Christian instead of shame

So again...

**What are the contours of your life – the line drawing of your circumstances?**

**How are you perceiving those circumstances – through your own lenses, or the lenses of faith?**

May all of us recognize Jesus presence with us now, today – so that we will see our circumstances, our lives, our concerns... the way he does... with the lenses of faith ...and be a people filled with a sense of his presence, the promise of hope, and the calling of God...

Let us pray:

Lord God you are the only who can give us lenses of faith to see our the difficult circumstances of our lives from a perspective of hope, rather than of despair. As we

gather around this table we remember the fact that you saw joy even as you endured the cross for our sake – *because you trusted in God to transform the cross into something wonderful that would be for our benefit.* As we partake of this table, give us the lenses of faith so that we might have your perspective and go out rejoicing. In Jesus' Name...

AMEN