



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### September 8, 2013

### "Why Are You Crying?" — John 20:1-18

### The Rev. Dr. Tim Shaw

**H**ide and Seek is a game I think all of us loved to play growing up. In regular Hide and Seek only one person is IT and everyone else hides. I always had way more fun hiding than being IT. Being IT is a hard job. It's not easy to be the one who is looking for everyone else. Whoever ends up being IT is will need to be super patient because the search is going to be long and hard, particularly if the kids you're playing with are really good at hiding.

About eleven weeks ago we began this sermon series on some of the questions God asks people in the Bible. The first question we looked at was asked by God of the first man and woman who were playing a newly invented game called "Hide and Seek". Walking through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day God called out to Adam and Eve, "Where are you?"

The human story is the story of one massive game of Hide and Seek. One of the challenges we have with this game is that we often get confused while playing the game. We have the tendency to get confused about who actually is IT.

If we happen to be interested in spiritual things, we tend to think that we're the ones who are searching for a God who seems to be hiding. There is some truth to this. Many of us are searching.

We're asking questions, we're studying the Bible, we're learning how to pray, we're enrolled in classes, and we come here to church in search of a God who often seems illusive. In fact, we turn some of the questions God has been asking us back on God. "Where are YOU, God? Why are YOU hiding from us? What is YOUR name?" And what we mean by that is, "What are YOU really like? Can you really be trusted?" We ask God, "What is that in YOUR HAND?" We want to know if God is actually capable of helping us. "Do YOU actually have any power to do something about what's going on in our world?"

And looking back on some of our most painful moments we ask God the same question God asked Job. We cry out to God, "Where were YOU, God, when my life was collapsing?"

It's true for many of us, maybe most of us here today. We are on a spiritual quest for God. We wouldn't be here this morning if we weren't. God does say to us in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart.*" (Jeremiah 29:13)

But that's not the whole story. In fact, it's not even the main part of the story. The truth is that you and I are not only searchers. We

are primarily hiders. I remember playing Hide and Seek with the kids in my neighborhood. There were some kids who were really good at hiding. I was an average hider. As adults, some of us have become really good at hiding. We cover up all the things in our lives we're too embarrassed to let other people see. We try to hide our faults, cover up our fears and then wonder why we feel so incredibly alone and even abandoned in life.

Hiding is usually our first reaction to messing up. But hiding can become a way of life. Human beings were not created to hide. From the start we were created to be known and to know others intimately. We were created to be seen in all our glory and imperfections and to see other people as they actually are. When we first meet Adam and Eve the amazing statement that is said about them is that they were naked and were not ashamed. No hiding. No reason to be ashamed. Fully known and at peace.

When our first ancestors decided that God could not be trusted, when they started to believe that God did not have their best interest at heart, when they began to believe the lie that God was holding out on them they turned away from God and went their own way. It was then that they decided they needed to hide.

**T**hey realized that they were naked, broken, inadequate, exposed. They were ashamed.

That's was exactly my story for many years until I started to grow in my knowledge and experience of the grace of God. I used to hide, in some very elaborate and subtle ways because I didn't want to be exposed. I didn't want to be seen for who I really was, a broken human being. I hid because I was afraid that if anyone really knew me they would not love me. I believed one of the great lies on the planet. I thought that I couldn't be fully loved if I was fully known. Because of Jesus Christ and the gift of His people in my life, I know that is not true.

In the opening chapters of Genesis Adam and Eve hide. And what does God do? He searches. He calls out to his fearful creatures. "Where are you?" Here He is, the God who allows His creation to hide from Him. Here is the God who searches and asks questions because He is truly interested in us. Here is the God who invites us to come out of hiding. God comes searching for us. God is the one who is IT.

And God comes searching for us with questions. He comes into our moments of crisis and asks us His probing questions. That is evidence of His love. He wants to be involved in our lives and He respects us enough to not just come at us with answers.

I can remember teaching two of my nephews how to water ski when they were about nine or ten years old. We were up on Lake Tahoe on a beautiful summer day. I was driving the ski boat. One of my nephews had just stood up on skis for the first time and he was feeling pretty good about himself. His cousin was now in the water

and was having a tough time standing up. As I was bringing the rope back to him, my other nephew turned to me and said, "I know what he's doing wrong." As we pulled up to his cousin in the water I turned to my nephew who was in the boat with me and said, "Don't say anything to him."

As I pulled along side my nephew I simply asked him, "What did you learn that time?" He said to me, "I tried to pull myself up instead of letting the boat pull me out of the water." "Exactly!" He took the rope, I took out the slack. I asked him if he was ready and he yelled, "Hit it!" And I turned around and there he was up on his skis and his cousin was cheering him on. Sometimes there is more power in a question than an answer given by someone else.

All of the questions we've looked at over the last 11 weeks are the questions of a God who is inviting us to come out of hiding. The last two questions that Pastor Dan will speak on are invitations to come out of our isolation; to come out of hiding. Do you want to get well? Do you know what I've done for you?

Today, we come to the amazing question the resurrected Jesus asks Mary outside the Garden Tomb. "Why are you crying? Tell me why you're crying." Let's turn to John chapter 20, verse 1.

*John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed 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 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*

*5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.*

*8 Then the other disciple, who 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 returned to their homes.*

After the Sabbath, on the first day of the week, a new world came into being. Mary was from a village on the shore of Sea of Galilee. Jesus had cast seven demons out her life. She was a wealthy woman who funded a good portion of Jesus' ministry. Mary is the first to see the stone rolled away. She is the first to speak with the angels, the first to see and touch the risen Christ. Mary, a woman, was the first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I don't want you to miss this very important point. The fact that the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is built around Mary Magdalene, is one of the reasons why we can trust that what we're reading here is history and not just propaganda. The role that Mary plays in this story gives it the ring of truth.

**S**ome argue that the early Christians made up these stories of the resurrection. The fact that a woman is at the center of this story makes it believable. If a bunch of first century guys, who wrote the gospels, were fabricating this story in order to convince other first century males that they were telling the truth, they would not have put Mary Magdalene at the center of the story. They would not have made a woman their first witness. It's one of the sad commentaries on the culture of the first century that women were often not treated with the respect they deserved and in many ways that culture of disrespect has only begun to change in our lifetime.

Sadly, in the first century no one making a case for something would bring in the testimony of a woman. I'm sorry to have to say that. In the first century, if a man was arguing his case before a court of law and his argument involved the testimony of a woman, it was often thrown out without any further consideration. Ron Sider writes, "The only explanation of the early church telling the Easter story the way it does is that it actually happened that way."

Mary goes to anoint the DEAD body of Jesus. She doesn't go to see if a miracle took place. She's not expecting that. She goes to sit and weep by the body of her friend. She goes to try and make sense of what has happened to this one that she loved, to try and deal with the unbelievable act of injustice she has just witnessed. Small, petty, power-hungry men had put to death this good man.

When Mary gets to the tomb she stops in her tracks. She sees that the stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away and Mary is horrified. She thinks someone had vandalized Jesus' grave. So she

runs to find Peter and John. She was not expecting resurrection. She thinks someone has stolen the body of her Lord. It was a common crime at the time. People would rob graves to get the linen wrappings and the expensive spices.

Mary tells John and Peter what she's seen. In his gospel, John always refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." I hope that every one of us who are followers of Christ can say that about ourselves, because it's true.

I love the foot race that takes place in this story. John, the young buck, outruns Peter to the grave. I love that little competitive commentary. John points out two times who won and who lost. John arrives first but stops outside the tomb. Peter gets the silver medal in this foot race, but he barges right in.

What do they see? They see strips of cloth lying there on a slab. Here were the strips of cloth that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped Jesus' body in on Friday. The strips were lying there like Jesus' body had just passed right through them. The strips of cloth were lying collapsed on the slab. The strips that had covered His head were separated from the strips that had wrapped His body because they were wrapped separately.

No one had stolen the body. Everything a grave robber would have wanted was still there. Peter and John leave the tomb. John believes that something miraculous has happened. Peter is not so sure. But Mary stays at the tomb.

John 20:11 *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into*

*the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other 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 *When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

15 *Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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 Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because 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 she told them that he had said these things to her.*

Here, in the empty tomb of Jesus sits two angels. They ask Mary, "Why are you crying? Don't you see what has happened?"

It's not hard to understand why she's weeping. She's lost everything. Jesus had loved her. He had freed her from bondage. He'd showed her the love that no other person had ever shown her and now He's dead. She can't find His body.

**B**ut the angels know something Mary does not yet understand or even thinks to believe. Her tears are completely appropriate and understandable. But they are not consistent with new reality she is about to discover. While looking at the angels Mary becomes aware that someone is standing behind her. She turns around and sees a man.

Jesus, the seeker, has pursued her. The Seeker has found her but she does not know that yet. She thinks He's the one who takes care of the garden and you know what? She's right about that. This is indeed God the Gardener. This is the same God that had walked in the first Garden, the Garden of Eden, calling out to the first man and woman who were hiding in shame. The Garden of Eden became a cemetery. God searched for the first man and woman and now we have this same God in a cemetery ready to announce that a new kind of life is now available to the world.

Mary doesn't realize who this is. He asks the same question the angels asked, "Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus knows the answer to that question and yet He asks it anyway. He asks the question because He wants to bring Mary, and He wants to bring us, out of the darkness. Questions have a way of doing that. He's drawing her out.

Jesus is present before we recognize His presence. We are sometimes not aware of the fact that He is right there with us because of our grief and our pain. Grief is a powerful force. When we're in pain, sometimes we can't see anything else. Our pain and disappointment can make it difficult for us to see who is actually there with us. Our

disappointment and hurt can keep us from recognizing the loving presence of Christ. Mary does not see who is standing right in front of her.

There are so many things that can get in the way of seeing who is right in front of us. Our pain, our disappointment, our anger, our fear, sometimes our questions, our hatred, our lack of forgiveness and our desire to nurse our grudges sometimes make it hard for us to see who is right in front of us.

Jesus says to her, "Mary!" When she hears her name on His lips it is then that she recognizes who He is. She wraps her arms around Him.

He tells her not to cling to Him not because it's wrong to touch Him, but because things are really, really different now. Jesus tells Mary to go to His brothers and sisters and tell them that He is ascending to your father and my father, to your God and my God. This is the first time Jesus calls His disciples brothers and sisters in the Gospel of John. Because He died and rose again they can now enjoy what He has enjoyed in God's presence for all eternity. The same relationship He has with God the Father is now theirs. A new day has dawned for the world.

The world's massive game of Hide and Seek rages on today. You and I have an invitation from God to come out of hiding. We have the invitation from a God who is searching for us and inviting us to set aside all our elaborate strategies of hiding.

God's questions are an invitation to come out of hiding. No matter what you've done to

mess up your life, you can take that next step toward Jesus Christ and come out of hiding.

Why are you crying? Our God is a God who weeps with those who weep. He is extending His heart of love and mercy to you and He is offering something beyond His compassion. The very life of God is available to all who trust in Christ for His forgiveness. Jesus is searching for you. And He is calling your name.

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*Note: The Rev. Dr. Tim Shaw is an associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu. Sunday sermon texts are also found at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org). The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes or [fpc.posterous.com](http://fpc.posterous.com). It can also be sent to you by e-mail. Request the free audio version: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*