



# Massanutten

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## Resurrection Life

A Sermon Preached by John P. Leggett

March 23, 2008

*Easter Sunday*

John 20:1-18

One of my favorite lines from John's Gospel comes in the very first chapter: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." But sometimes, when the darkness presses in, I wonder if John had it right, and I'm admitting to that fear on the easier side of Easter. I can only imagine what Mary Magdalene must have been thinking on her side of Easter.

John's Easter story begins, not surprisingly, in the darkness. Throughout his Gospel, there has been a tension between the darkness and the light, and if John wants us to learn deeply that the darkness will never overcome the light, the darkness created by the death of hope on Good Friday is a worthy adversary. Other Gospel writers may prefer the story to begin at first light, but John is not afraid to trust that even the darkest night will be shattered by resurrection light.

Mary Magdalene—alone—makes her way through that darkness in John's Gospel. While she has companions in other accounts, here she is painfully alone. Her solitude, at least for me, heightens the palpable grief that marks her journey to Jesus' grave.

As Mary Magdalene makes her way through the darkness of that first Easter morning, making her way to the tomb where the light of life has been sealed away, she surely would have argued with John. The darkness hadn't simply overcome the light; it had consumed it. The light that John tells us is life had gone out, and Mary's world is still spinning out of control.

As Easter has approached this year, one image has kept popping into my mind. It was an image that I saw first-hand near the end of one of our Christmas Eve services. We had already shared the familiar story of how the people who lived in the land of deep darkness were given the light that no darkness would ever overcome; we had feasted on grace at the table of our Lord; and now we were engaged in that pinnacle moment of sentimentality—or is it mystery—when we passed the light of Christ from one candle to another. As many of you probably know, we always form a circle around the edges of the sanctuary and it is amazing to watch the darkness fade away as the light shines. I can still remember back to that night just three short months ago. I remember thinking to myself, "John had it right. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

But soon my fear that John had it wrong returned. As is typical at such services, about five folks stayed in their seats. From where I stood, I began to wonder whether or not I should take my light to them. Those of you who know me well know that I created a whole litany of back-stories as to why they weren't joining the circle. Perhaps one would have difficulty standing or holding a candle; another was possibly just too despairing to join in; still another may have wanted to see what it looked like from a different vantage point. I thought about these things as I stood there, holding my candle against the dark-





