

Assumptions

April 5, 2026

Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

It's very difficult to get through the day without making decisions based on assumptions. Absent any reason to believe otherwise, I assume that the sun will rise in the morning and set in the evening, and I act accordingly. I assume that gravity will hold me to the ground and that when I breathe in, I'll take in good air. I assume that water will satisfy my thirst and that eating will satisfy my hunger.

I have to say that those assumptions have held up pretty well over the years.

There are other assumptions that I tend to check. I'll give a sniff to the package of grated cheese in the refrigerator before I add it to anything. Lately with our rather chilly mornings I've been checking the temperature outside before picking up a jacket – even though I feel somewhat cold in the house. It might be warmer outside; who knows?

Then there are the things I avoid making assumptions about. When driving, I take note of people's turn signals, but you know what? I prepare myself for other drivers to do things they haven't signaled. It's not very trusting, I know, but it's helped keep me from accidents. And anyone who has watched me with my keys has seen me tap my pocket – or reach into it – before I close a door that will lock. I always put my keys in the same pocket. But do I trust them to be there?

No.

On that first Easter morning, assumptions were front and center, as is common for human beings. Most of the assumptions were completely normal ones, things that we assume as well from one day to the next.

The first assumption was so human that John didn't bother to name it. "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb..." John didn't mention her reason, because he didn't have to. We mourn at graves and tombs and columbaria whether the death was recent – like Friday – or years and years ago. Look over a cemetery sometime. Look at all the floral displays. Each one marks a visit in love and grief.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb assuming that things would be as they'd been on Friday, and that was the first assumption to give way that morning. She saw the stone had been rolled aside. For the moment, she didn't even look inside. She ran back to the place where some of

the disciples were staying. She'd made an assumption, I think: she assumed that they could do something to help. It didn't turn out to be a good assumption. They ran out to the tomb themselves, but once they arrived, what could they do? They looked inside. They saw the discarded grave cloths. One of them believed – though it's one of the mysteries of this text what he believed – and then...

They left. Whatever Mary Magdalene had hoped for from the two men, she didn't get it.

She was left now with, perhaps not an assumption, but a conclusion. Something was wrong. Beyond the terrible loss of Jesus' life, now his body had disappeared. Someone who had been cruelly put to death could not even be left to rest in peace.

She looked into the tomb for the first time that morning, and found it, not empty as I'm sure she assumed, but occupied by what John described later as two angels in white. I'm sure she assumed that they were ordinary people, because she didn't ask them anything. She just told them why she was crying.

Then the final assumption. Outside the tomb stood another person, a male figure in the morning light. He asked her who she was looking for – an important question. As Karoline Lewis writes at *Working Preacher*, "This is the third time this question has appeared in the Gospel, every time asked by Jesus. They are his first words to the first disciples, with the only difference being 'what' instead of 'whom' (John 1:38). To ask this question of Mary here takes the reader back to the calling of the disciples and implies that Mary, too, is considered a disciple."

Of course she was wrong. It wasn't a gardener. It was Jesus. In that moment of realization, so many assumptions came crashing down. In the normal way of things, the powers of the city leadership, the priesthood, and especially the Roman Governor should have been close to absolute. If they decided to execute someone and to further humiliate him after his death, they could do it. They did do it to people over and over again.

On that Easter morning, Mary found that the normal way of things wasn't. The normal way of things had given way to something greater. Her assumptions had to be laid aside and left behind.

As Dorothy A. Lee writes at *Working Preacher*, "Mary does not reach the heights of faith without a struggle. This is a characteristic feature of John's stories, in which faith comes through layers of misunderstanding. Step-by-step, the exemplary characters of the Gospel, including Mary herself, come to a spiritual comprehension of what is happening, moving from the material to the spiritual level. In this process, matter is not dismissed or set aside. On the contrary, the material is itself the means by which God in Christ is revealed, just as the flesh of Jesus in the incarnation radiates the divine glory (1:14)."

Her assigned task – to tell Jesus’ other friends and followers that he had risen – is the reason she has been called “the apostle to the apostles” for centuries. It’s worth noting that they don’t seem to have believed her. They had to make their own journey through misunderstanding.

On this Easter Day, what assumptions can we, might we, possibly even should we leave behind?

I think we might start by building on Mary’s assumption that that Sunday morning would be like any other morning. It was a uniquely heartbreaking morning, but familiar. We begin most of our days, even the heartbreaking ones, believing that they will be more or less predictable, that while they might bring some surprises, even those unusual things will fit within our basic expectations.

Perhaps we might consider each day as a potential setting for a miracle.

In a sense, miracles happen every day. On the worst day I’ve ever lived, I have been living, and life itself is miraculous. The natural world is resplendent with beauty of sight, sound, smell, texture, and taste. Human love, expressed through conversation in person or over the ether, fills the heart. Each day is filled with miracles.

But each day is also one in which God’s uniquely overwhelming love might make itself felt – any morning, any noon, any evening, any night. At any moment, we might find our hearts moved by something that is the compassion of God, the embrace of Jesus, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. At any moment, we might find ourselves surprised to find that death does not have the power we assume, that oppressive earthly authorities do not have the last word, that sin and evil cannot stand against the power of love.

What would it have looked like if Mary had come to the tomb on a day that could have included a miracle?

She might have viewed the moved stone with wonder. She might have fetched the disciples to join her in awe. She might have recognized the angels as angels, and she might have asked them, “What has happened?” rather than continuing to assume that she knew what had happened.

Finally, she might have recognized Jesus before he said her name. She might not have shown it – even in a mind ready for a miracle, I’d have probably been speechless – but when Jesus did say her name, when he did demonstrate that she was one of his flock, whose name he knew, when he called her, I’m pretty sure she’d have done exactly what she did.

Rush to embrace him.

What would it look like for us to see each day as a potential setting for a miracle?

I'm pretty sure we'd appreciate the daily miracles better – sunrise, sunset, sea foam, birdsong, mountains, flowers, and above all else the wonders of human companionship. Those are worth celebrating.

We're also likely to approach the sadnesses and trials of our days with more hope. Pain and sorrow are real, but in any day God might just do something to comfort them. We still have to work to make things better, but we can do so confident of God's aid.

Most of all, we live each day prepared to say, "I have seen the Lord," I know that my Redeemer lives, I have heard my name, I have been held in loving embrace, I have a story to tell and to share from it.

Let today be one in which you celebrate the Easter miracle, and rejoice in the life of Jesus.

Let tomorrow be one in which you anticipate new miracles, and rejoice ever and always in the life of Jesus.

Amen.

by Eric Anderson