

Sermon preached at OCC, Easter Sunday, 5 April 2026

Open our ears to hear your Word proclaimed in this place. Open our hearts to know your Love offered in this congregation. Open our eyes to see your Presence blessing us in this moment. In Jesus' name, Amen.

John 20:1-18; Colossians 3:1-14

Easter Identity 101

Happy Easter, everyone. It is a joy to gather and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mary stood outside the tomb, weeping. She saw Jesus, but did not recognise him. She thought he was the gardener. And then everything changed with one word: “Mary.” In that moment, she recognised him. Not because she understood what had happened. Not because she expected resurrection. But because she was called by name. And in that moment, something deeper also happened—she began to understand who she was.

1. Identity Disrupted and Given

We live in a time where identity is often something we try to construct. People present themselves, shape their stories, and seek recognition—hoping to be seen and affirmed. But this is not entirely new. In Jesus' time, identity was also structured and reinforced through social systems. In the Roman world, people lived within what scholars call brokerage relationships—networks of power, honour, and obligation. Your identity was shaped by: who you were connected to; who spoke for you; and where you stood in the hierarchy.

At the same time, Jewish identity was shaped by covenant: belonging to the people of Israel, marked by practices such as circumcision, and rooted in a shared story with God. These were meaningful and powerful ways of knowing who you were. But they were also, in different ways, bounded by status; by structure; by ethnicity.

And then comes Easter. Mary stands there, still within that world of assumptions. She sees Jesus—but interprets him through what she already knows: “the gardener.” But when Jesus calls her by name—everything shifts. Her identity is no longer determined by social structure, cultural expectation, or even prior understanding. It is given through a relationship. Like the

sheep who recognise the shepherd's voice, she knows she belongs. Not because she has figured it out—but because she is known.

And Mary is not alone. Again and again, in the resurrection accounts, the disciples do not recognise Jesus at first; the travellers on the road to Emmaus walk with him unknowingly. Recognition comes later. And when it comes, it is always relational: a voice; the breaking of bread; a moment of connection which tells us something essential: Easter identity begins not with our recognition of Christ, but with Christ's recognition of us.

2. An Identity “From Above”

Paul, in Colossians, gives language to this transformation. He writes: “You have been raised with Christ... your life is hidden with Christ in God.” This means that our identity is no longer grounded in what is “below”: not in systems of power; not in cultural divisions; not even in ethnic boundaries. As Paul says: “There is no longer Greek and Jew... but Christ is all and in all.” This is not a denial of difference. But it is a reordering of identity. Our primary identity is now “from above.”

And yet, Paul is careful. This identity is real—but still hidden. We live in what we might call an “already but not yet” reality: already raised with Christ; not yet fully revealed in him. Which is why Paul speaks of putting off and putting on. The old self—with its patterns of anger, division, and harm—has been stripped away. And we are now called to clothe ourselves with the new self: compassion, kindness, humility, and patience. And above all, with love, which binds everything together.

This can feel demanding. Even unrealistic. But Paul is not saying: *become this in order to belong*. He is saying: this is who you already are—now live into it. So when we struggle... when we fall short... It does not mean we have lost our identity. It means we are still growing into the life that is already ours in Christ.

3. Living the Easter Identity

Easter is not only about Jesus being raised. It is about us being raised with him. Our identity is no longer something we construct, defend, or prove. It is something we receive. And because we receive it, it begins to transform how we live. This transformation is not abstract. It becomes visible: in how we treat one another; in how we care for the vulnerable; in how we relate to

creation itself, because this identity is not self-contained. It expands outward through love. And this is where it becomes real for us as a church.

To live as an Easter people is to become a community where this identity takes shape. A community that restores what is broken, nurtures those who struggle, walks with the sick and the grieving, cares for the world God has made. This is what we are seeking as we grow as an Eco-Church that cares for all forms of life here and now. Not simply as an initiative—but as an expression of who we are becoming.

Like Mary, we may not always recognise clearly. Like the disciples, we may still be learning. But the good news of Easter is this: Christ calls us—by name. And in that calling, we are given a new identity not defined by what is “below,” but rooted in the life of God. So may we hear his voice again. May we be found by the risen Lord, day by day. And may our lives be shaped—more and more—by the identity we have already received in him.

Amen.