

**Easter 2021**  
**Mary!**  
**John 20:1-18**  
**040421**

**Offering Prayer**

- 1 God, we have gathered this morning to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  - a The fact that Jesus rose from the dead changes everything and has changed everything in our lives.
  - b We were headed in one direction doing our own thing and then in a moment of time the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection was made real to us and the whole course of our life changed.
  - c And it is for that reason and to that cause that we give our tithes and offerings to you. Whether we have given online or onsite we take a moment to say to you ... Jesus you have my heart and I believe in your cause.
- 2 Lord, I pray that every person here this morning and those watching online ... would experience the aliveness of Jesus Christ through the proclaiming of his Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - a I pray that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead would be realized by people who have lost hope.
  - b I pray that those who are doubting will be filled with faith and those who are discouraged will be encouraged.
  - c I pray for people who have wandered from you that they would hear your voice speaking to their hearts this morning to come home to the Father's house.
  - d I pray for those who have yet to really believe ...that they will fully trust in you. I pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Introduction**

- 1 The passage I would like to share from this morning is found in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel. It is the account of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus following his resurrection.  
*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the*

*one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" John 20:1-2*

- 2 The other gospel writers (Matt, Mark & Luke) tell us two additional things here that are helpful. First, the stone had been rolled away by an angel and secondly Mary was accompanied by at least four other women.
  - a John alludes to this when he records Mary's words in verse 2, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"
  - b Even though John alludes to the other women, he does not mention them by name because his record of the resurrection highlights how certain individuals *experienced* the resurrection ... Mary Magdalene first, then Thomas (see my hands/side) and finally Peter by the Sea of Galilee (Simon do you truly love me?).
- 3 And perhaps the reason John is led by the Holy Spirit to do this is because the resurrection when understood from scripture and believed in our heart is very personal and life changing. It's more than something we come to know about or agree with, it is something we personally experience.
  - a There is this moment in every believer's life where the living Jesus became alive to us.
  - b And this is very important. It's one thing to know the resurrection of Jesus happened, it's another thing, as Paul says, to know the power of his resurrection in our own lives (Philippians 3:10).
  - c So, this portion of John's gospel highlights the personal experience of Mary Magdalene with resurrected Jesus.
- 4 Mary Magdalene, as her name implies, was from the fishing town of Magdala (Migdal) on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.
  - a The Jewish historian Josephus says Magdala had a population of 40,000 people and a fleet of 230 boats and therefore was a major first century port on the Sea of Galilee. But what Magdala is most known for is one woman named Mary.
  - b There are many Mary's spoken of in the gospels for Mary or Miriam was the most popular women's name in Jewish culture in Jesus' day. We first hear of this particular Mary, Mary of Magdala, in Luke 8 where we learn that after Jesus freed her from seven demons, she became a follower of Jesus and traveled with him and the disciples.

- c She was not only a follower but also a monetary supporter of Jesus' ministry. So apparently before all her maladies beset her, she was a woman of some financial means.
  - d She is mentioned twelve times in the gospels more than any other woman and more than most of the apostles. Most importantly Mary Magdalene is a poignant illustration of how the resurrection of Jesus changes our lives.
- 5 So, upon seeing the empty tomb Mary ran back to Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved which is how John refers to himself in his gospel.
- a Apparently, Peter and John were staying in quarters separate from the rest of the disciples most likely in Jerusalem presumably because they were the only disciples who stuck around to see what happened to Jesus.
  - b According to Luke, after Mary left the tomb angels appeared to the rest of the women and said why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen! With that news they then ran back to tell the rest of the disciples who were probably staying in the nearby village of Bethany.
  - c After Mary arrived at where Peter and John were lodging, she reported the news of the empty tomb. At that news ....  
*So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but John outran Peter and reached the tomb first (John 20:3-4).*
- 6 Apparently, John was a better athlete than Peter and he arrived first, followed by Peter and then eventually by Mary. But before Peter or Mary arrived verse five says that John ...  
*He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) John 20:5-9*
- 7 John was not like Peter who upon arriving at the tomb seemed to enter into it without a second thought. No, he was a bit slower at entering the tomb.
- a But once he did and after remembering the words of Jesus and considering the evidence of the empty tomb, he believed.

b John however was unique. The rest of the disciples really struggled with believing in the resurrection before actually seeing Jesus alive.

*<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to their homes, <sup>11</sup> but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. <sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."*

8 When angels appear in the Bible it is a significant sign that God is at work or about to do something incredible. But Mary is so distraught that even the presence of two angels could not dissuade her grief.

a She had witnessed all his sufferings and seen him die (Mark 14:40,47). And as she comes to anoint his body and certainly to say her last goodbyes she discovers his body is missing.

b It's like the final straw and it just broke her. She would be healed but first she, like every other human being, needed to be confronted with the resurrection.

### **[1] The resurrection confronts our misconceptions about Jesus**

*"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."<sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus (John 20:13).*

1 And this inability to immediately identify Jesus after his resurrection was not uncommon among those who knew him prior to his death. Apparently, his resurrected body was different enough that he was not immediately recognized but not so different he could not be recognized.

2 But Mary's inability to recognize Jesus was primarily caused by something else ... her misconception about Jesus.

a She saw him suffer. She saw him die on a cross. She saw him buried in a grave.

b And she was interpreting everything through this narrative of a dead Jesus. They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him (John 20:13).

3 To Mary Jesus was a dead prophet and because of this narrative she failed to recognize Jesus as the living Lord.

- a The same was true for nearly everybody in Jerusalem. Acts 13 tells us, *The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus (Acts 13:27).*
  - b The same was true for all of Israel. *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him (Jn 1:11).*
  - c And what was true of the Jewish people was really true of the whole world. *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him (John 1:10).*
- 4 So in a way, Mary represents the entire human race. She doesn't realize it's Jesus. Her narrative would not allow her to recognize him as the Living Son of God.
- a The truth is that no one of their own ability recognizes, believes or pursues Jesus, the Son of God. Paul wrote in Romans 3 ... *there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God (Romans 3:11).*
    - That does not mean that no one seeks for a god or for the divine or that no one seeks to become more spiritual. Hundreds of millions of people do that.
    - What it means is that no one seeks the true God revealed in the Bible.
  - b We seek spirituality, religion and even the religion of irreligion. But the human heart always wants a god who fits our narrative, the way we see things, our desires and what we want. Intrinsicly we want a God we can control, who doesn't challenge our self-assessments and narratives.
  - c We want a god that lets us believe what we want to believe and do what we want to do.
- 5 The problem with that is that kind of god is powerless truly help you and will never change you.
- a For example, think about people who are deeply unsure of their own worth, people who struggle with self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy.
  - b What's going to change their flawed self-understanding and turn them into people with graceful confidence? What will free them from self-condemnation?
  - c A self-help seminar can only modify feelings of inadequacy. It cannot fundamentally transform our inner person. Only God can do that. 1 John 3:20 says: "If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts." But that assumes you have a God who is there, who is real and can tell you things you don't want to believe.

- 6 The biblical God is a God that modern people would never invent. He is a God who is holy and righteous who cannot just overlook sin and guilt. This is why it was necessary for Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place.
  - a It is only this Savior who forever lives with scars in his hands and side who can come to us and say, “You feel condemned? I bore your condemnation. You feel worthless? You are so valuable to me I poured out my life for you.
  - b It is only this God who can transform our self-understanding by fundamentally changing us from the inside-out with his truth.
  - c And that begins by taking him for who he actually is, believing what he says he has done for you through the cross and his resurrection. The resurrection says Jesus is who he says he is. He is the Son of God risen from the dead. Simply put...

## **[2] The resurrection calls us to believe in Jesus**

- 1 The resurrection not only confronts our misconceptions about Jesus, it calls us to believe in Jesus. And for Mary that was accomplished with two questions.

*“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”*  
*Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him” (John 20:15).*
- 2 The term “woman” was used in Jesus’ day as a title of honor somewhat like Ma’am in our culture. So, in essence, ma’am why are you crying and who is it you are looking for?
- 3 Now when the Lord asks you questions it is never to gain information but to bring about transformation.
  - a And we see this in the second question which has a double meaning. Who is it that you are looking for? It’s almost as if Jesus is saying, “Yes you’re looking for a person but not the person you think.”
  - b You’re narrative of a dead Jesus is causing you to look for a Jesus that does not exist. I’m not dead, I am alive and unless you see that you will only be left with following the sayings of a great deceased humanitarian instead of the living Lord who saves you, forgives you, liberates you and heals you.
- 3 But Mary’s false narrative keeps her from seeing Jesus. And so Jesus intervenes by calling her by name.

***Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). John 20:16***

- a It wasn't his appearance nor the sound of his voice that she recognized, it was when he called her by name, Mary.
  - b And notice the order. Mary does not call out “Rabboni” and Jesus answers with “Mary.” Rather we hear Jesus call out “Mary” which is followed by her replying in amazement, “Rabboni.” That's grace. Jesus calls we respond.
- 4 The message of the Bible is ... 1) That we would never choose the God revealed in the Bible because he does not meet our idea of what he should be. 2) There would be no hope for us if God waited for us to realize who he is and believe. 3) Therefore, God himself personally intervenes and calls us to believe.
- a There is not a believer in this room that would say they became a follower of Christ by their own initiative. Yes, they took a step of faith but that step of faith was a response to the loving call of Christ to come unto him.
  - b There was a certain point where Jesus became very real to them. They heard the gospel and experienced the aliveness of Jesus and believed ... just like Mary Magdalene who upon hearing the call of Jesus responds with Rabboni.
- 5 The word Rabboni is an Aramaic word and Aramaic was one of the three languages that the people spoke in.
- a The international language of the day and the language the New Testament was written in was Greek. The religious language of the Jews used in worship was Hebrew but the mother tongue of most Jews was Aramaic which was similar to Hebrew. So this conversation between Jesus and Mary was in Aramaic.
  - b Several times throughout the gospels the writers will substitute the Aramaic word in place of the Greek word and it is usually to describe a moment of great emotion. For example, Jesus words from the cross, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
  - c It's almost as if the moment was so powerful that the secondary language of Greek would not convey the depth of emotion that the birth language of the disciples would.
- 6 This is the case with Mary's response to Jesus, Rabboni.

- a “Rabboni” is an Aramaic word that is from the Aramaic word Rabbi which means “teacher.” Rabbi was a term of great respect and by the end of the first century became the title for the leader of a Jewish synagogue.
  - b But Mary does not say Rabbi, she says Rabboni which was a more intense form of Rabbi that in Jesus’ day was used almost exclusively in talking to God.
  - c So, in one moment Mary went from relating to Jesus as Rabbi (respected teacher) to Rabboni (God). It was similar to a moment Thomas had when he saw the resurrected Lord and immediately proclaimed my Lord and my God.
- 7 What led to such immediate change? The resurrection. Jesus is alive and that changes everything. And certainly for Mary ... who responds to Jesus by embracing him. And at that embrace Jesus says to her something that requires explanation.
- Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father” (John 20:17).*
- a Do not hold on to me suggests Mary was clinging to Jesus ... probably to his feet much like the other group of women did when they saw Jesus on their way back to tell the other disciples (Matthew 28:9).
  - b This falling down and holding onto someone’s feet was a cultural sign of either submission, humility and worship. But in Mary’s case it was also a sign of closeness.
  - c The resurrection not only confronts our misconceptions about Jesus, calls us to believe in Jesus, it also offers us closeness with Jesus.

### **[3] The resurrection offers us closeness with Jesus**

- 1 When Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me,” he was not saying don’t embrace me or don’t touch me for not a week later he invites Thomas to touch the scars in his hands and side.
  - a No what he was saying was that he didn’t want Mary to think that she could continue her relationship with him after the resurrection the same way she did before the resurrection.
  - b The same closeness would remain but in a different way and he would provide that after he ascended and returned to his Father.
- 2 The week before, in the Upper Room discourse (John 14-17), Jesus told the disciples he was going away but that he would not leave them orphans but

would come to them through the Holy Spirit whom he would send to dwell within them (John 14:16–18). Later on, in the same teaching he says ...

*But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7).*

- a This was a bit of a paradox to the disciples and certainly not how Mary or the rest of the disciples initially felt when Jesus first appeared to them.
  - b This is one reason that after Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to the disciples and his followers for a period of forty days before finally ascending to heaven (Acts 1:3). He had to coach them into a new way of experiencing closeness with him through the Holy Spirit.
  - c In essence Jesus was saying he had to go away from them in order to become closer to them ... he had to go away in order to become even more real than he had ever been to the disciples.
  - d If he goes away and sends the Spirit they would be able to see his beauty, glory and goodness in a way they could not have done while he was on the earth.
  - e This is really important because we might be tempted to think that it would have been so much better to have actually been there ... to hear his voice and see and embrace his physical person like Mary.
  - f But Jesus is saying that we can see his glory and his closeness better than any of his followers did while he was on the earth ... greater than if Jesus had actually held us in his arms and embraced us.
- 4 So the resurrection offers all disciples of Jesus of all ages more closeness than the original disciples had.
- a Jesus underscores this in his words to Thomas, *“Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed** are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29).*
  - b This blessing is not theoretical or conceptual but real and experiential. And if we are not careful, we can easily drift into the place where we no longer experience the daily reality of the aliveness of Jesus where he speaks to our heart in regular, powerful, tangible life changing ways.
  - c If we are not careful we can drift into the narrative that says Jesus rose from the dead theologically or “on paper” but he is not experientially speaking to my heart on Monday morning.
  - d And this is why we need to join Paul in praying that we would know Christ in the power of his resurrection (Phil 3:10). And as we do ...

#### **[4] The resurrection compels us to tell others about Jesus**

*“Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”* <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: *“I have seen the Lord!”* And she told them that he had said these things to her (John 20:17b–18).

- 1 Mary was the first to see Jesus. After John, Mary was the very first to believe in Jesus. She was also the first to share the gospel of Jesus. And what compelled her to do so ... Jesus was alive.
- 2 Earlier I quoted from the first chapter of John’s gospel. *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.* <sup>11</sup> *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* <sup>12</sup> *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:10-12).*

#### **Discussion Questions**

- 1 What part of today’s message spoke to you the most?
- 2 In First Corinthians Paul boils the gospel down to one statement ... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ... (1 Cor 15:3b-4).
  - Why does the gospel include not only Christ’s death for our sins but also his resurrection?  
[Leader: The resurrection proved the death was accepted by God as payment for our sins. Think of showing your receipt at the door of Sam’s Club that proves the price for what you have has been paid.]
  - Why do you think Paul repeats the phrase “according to the Scripture.”  
[Leader: Both the death and resurrection of Christ was foretold in Old Testament Scripture. Again, one book, one story and one hero our Savior Jesus Christ.]
- 3 How do you think Mary felt when she first realized that Jesus was alive?  
How did you come to first realize that Jesus was alive?
- 4 How has the resurrection of Jesus shaped the way you think about things ... your life, other people, the world, money, death, etc?