

## Easter Message

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Happy Easter to you all. It's my joy to share with you the word of God. And as we prepare our hearts this morning, would you open your hearts as we go before the Lord in prayer?

*Gracious, Lord, thank You for your word. Thank You for today's word. Open us up to that word, Lord, and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what You would have us learn. As You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Father, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I'd like to tell you an ancient story. Comes to us from the gospel according to John, Chapter 20, starting in verse one. This is what it says,

**"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. 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 NIV].**

Just pause there for a second. The phrase 'the disciple that Jesus loved,' that's referring to the writer of the Gospel of John; he's talking about himself. Just say it, that becomes really critical for us to hear and understand in just a few moments. Verse three,

**"So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running," [John 20:3-4 NIV].**

I have a question to ask for all of us. What would make you run to a tomb? What would make you run to a tomb?

**"Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen." [John 20:4-7 NIV].**

That's their editorially by the writer, John, to let the reader know, "Hey, nobody stole this body. If robbers came in and stole Jesus's body, the linen cloths would be strewn all over the place." This is a very clear statement by John letting us know, the reader, that something very unique has occurred. Proceed.

**"Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed." John 20:8 NIV].**

Notice John is referring to himself. He saw, and he believed, verse nine is parenthetical.

**"(They still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying." [John 20:9-10 NIV].**

All right, I have to pause here. So, Peter and John, they go running to the tomb. They hear something is amiss, they see with their own eyes, something is different than what they had expected. And they turn around and go home. They turn around and go home. This passage is telling us that they didn't make the connection yet. John believed he's giving himself props. I got it. I got it. He's writing about it. It's his book. He could write whatever he wants. Peter didn't get it. At least that's the impression we get in this moment. But the story is not done yet. Verse 11.

**"Now, Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 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." [John 20:11-13 NIV].**

Notice she's so caught up in her grief, she doesn't even acknowledge the fact that there's two live angelic figures seated in the tomb that weren't there before.

**"At this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means teacher). (John 20:14-16 NIV).**

In fact, in Aramaic, Rabboni means "my teacher." It's much more personal. My teacher. Mary is so overcome with grief that she does not even acknowledge angels. She does not even see Jesus for who He is until He names her. Jesus names Mary, and in that moment, her eyes are opened up and she sees Jesus. Now look what happens, verse 17.

**"Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father." [John 20:17 NIV].**

So there's a back story here, what we are not privy to in that moment just before Jesus says this, is the fact that that Mary is so overcome emotionally that she grabs a hold of Jesus and clings on to him. Picture that. Jesus says, "Hey, don't hold on to me." In Greek, the word is, "don't cling to me," and it's not so much that Jesus is saying, "Hey, I need my space here. What about social distancing here? You know what's with this? At least six inches, Mary." You know that's what it's appropriate for men and women back in the day, you know, perhaps even more. Now he doesn't do any of that. What he's saying is, "Mary, it's OK. You can let me go. Really, trust me. It's really me." Mary is so overcome and so relieved, she grabs a hold of him and does not want to let go. Have you ever been there with somebody that you loved? Whether when they're about to leave and you don't want them to leave. Or they came back after a long stretch, and you've missed them so much. Or because of the nature of their struggle. Or yours? You never want to let go of them again. Now you have the picture of Mary's response.

**"Jesus said, "do not hold on to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 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 17-18 NIV].**

So I have a question - question number two for us for today. Why did Jesus not reveal himself to Peter and John, but wait to do so only with Mary? He had the opportunity. Peter and John, they were there. In fact, John had an opportunity to even write about it. Not only did I make it to the tomb ahead of Peter that slowpoke, not only did I believe as soon as I saw the evidence. But he could have said I saw Jesus, Jesus appeared to me. But that's not how the story goes. That's not what happened. Peter and John left. They went back home. It wasn't until Mary saw Jesus that the story began to unfold as we know it today. Amazing. Why did Jesus not reveal himself to Peter and John, but wait until only Mary was around? I think it's a great question. And I think I found a clue to the answer embedded in an Old Testament book; an Old Testament prophet named Jeremiah. In a passage that we heard before, and many of us know firsthand. It's from Jeremiah, 29, starting a verse 11 we read,

**"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." [Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV].**

You will find me when you seek me, when you seek me with your whole heart. I think Jesus revealed himself to Mary first because she was the first one in that moment that was actually looking for Jesus. Peter and John saw the evidence. John tells us that he believed, but he went home. Peter, we don't know what was going on in his mind, but he went home. Mary stayed looking. Searching. And based on her response, she was searching with her whole heart. Are you looking for Jesus? Are you looking for Jesus?

This Easter is an invitation for us to turn and look for the one, the only one who can radically change the course of our lives. And I know that there are people in this room who are needing to see Jesus. You're needing to see Jesus and you need to know this Easter, that Jesus sees you. He sees you looking for him. Jesus sees you. For example, when your son or daughter has given up on church. He sees you when you've just heard a diagnosis of cancer. He sees you when you've been laid off from your job. He sees you when your spouse has cheated on you. He sees you when your partner said that they don't love you anymore. He sees you when your child tells you that they hate you. Jesus sees you when you've been made fun of at school or at work. Jesus sees you when you've watched your savings disappear as you've been working so hard to get out of debt. Jesus sees you when you've tried to commit to quit smoking and feel like you've failed time and time again. Jesus sees you when you've tried to lose weight, but now can't look in the mirror because you're too embarrassed or ashamed.

Jesus sees you when you've tried desperately to have a child, but it never seems to happen. He sees you when you've had to move because of your job and now have no friends. Jesus sees you when you work very hard, and no one seems to notice or care. Jesus sees you when someone else always gets the better deal. Jesus sees you when your best friend has betrayed you. Jesus sees you when you've been living a lie. Jesus sees you when you've been struggling with an addiction to alcohol or to drugs or to sex or to porn. He sees you when you've tried to break that addiction but continue to feel defeated. Jesus sees you when you've lost friends because of your faith. He sees you when you've been abused by your spouse. He sees you when you're feeling alone and lonely, when you're feeling rejected because of who you are. He sees you when you've contemplated suicide. He's seen you when your friends have actually committed suicide. He sees you and your husband or wife or son or daughter or mother or father has died. Jesus sees you when you've lost your pet and that was your best friend. Jesus sees you when you've changed careers or habits in order to honor the Lord. He

sees you when you've been told you need hospice care or when you're facing eviction. He sees you when you felt there's no one else to turn to. And He sees you when you've felt stuck in a job that you hate. He sees you when you have felt unloved or unlovable. Jesus sees you when you have felt helpless or hopeless. He sees you and cares. And He wants you to know that He's faithful to His promises only one thing is asked - that you look for Him. And if you look for Him, you will discover that He's waiting to reveal Himself to you. He's waiting. You can find Him when you see Him for who He is. Lord of Life and Lord of all.

So, this Easter, today, I invite you to make a choice to believe that Jesus sees you like Mary did a long time ago. I invite you to make a choice to actually look for Jesus if you've not done so before. I invite you to make a choice to commit or recommit your life to Jesus. Today of all days, I beg of you don't let another day go by, don't let another year go by where you push aside everything that is faith oriented because it's not politically correct or because you're not ready to surrender your heart or life. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, but we do know in the moment that Jesus invites you to see Him and reveals Himself to those who are searching. Open your heart, I beg of you. Open your heart and reach out to the only one who can bring hope into your life, who can break the powers that have held you. Open your heart and life to the Lord of Life and you will discover true life.

When we are experiencing that commitment to renewing our life in Christ. We are simply taking everything about who we are, even in our brokenness, even in our sin. In fact, because of our sin, because of our brokenness, because of everything that is wrong with who we are, or even the things that seem like their right so that we don't even need God taking all of that and placing it at the foot of the Cross of Christ. Placing it at the at the foot of the one who gave his life for us. The one who died for us so that we could have the abundant life that God has has designed for us to live. A reminder to you on what Jesus has done for you and a choice that you are making to seek him. And to place your trust in his life. Friends. This is the day of new beginnings. This is Easter. It's not just about chocolate bunnies, although they are good. It's not just about, you know, the the candied eggs. It's not about colorful eggs and bunny rabbits. It's about a day that Mary's life was forever changed. It's about a day that Peter and John and all of the other disciples would give their lives to a whole new mission. This is the day that reminds us of the many individuals who had put their lives on the line to be followers of Jesus. It all started with a simple yes. A yes to the one who has said yes to you. Just keep your eyes fixed on the one who promises life, Jesus.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Second Corinthians Chapter 5 that when we put our trust in Him, a new creation takes place. All things are made new. God has recreated this opportunity. Let us give Him thanks.

Christ has risen. He has risen indeed. You have heard the word proclaimed, now it's time for us to go forth out of this house of worship, to live it with our lives and to bear witness with all of what we do, all of what we say and all of what we become to the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is alive. He's alive and He's at work in and through you. God bless you. Have a great week. And Happy Easter, everybody. God bless you.