

“RESURRECTION PEOPLE!”

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Text: John 20:1-18 NLT**God’s Word: Acts 10:34-43 NLT****John 20:1-18 NLT**

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. ² She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. ⁴ They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. ⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— ⁹ for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then they went home. ¹¹ Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. ¹² She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. ¹⁵ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” ¹⁶ “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”). ¹⁷ “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

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*“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb...”*

“It was still dark.” Why does John decide to make sure that little tidbit of information is in the story? Is it by accident? Is it to let us know that it was before sunrise that Mary Magdalene went to Jesus’ tomb—as soon as she could come following the Saturday Sabbath? Or does it run deeper than that?

The Gospel of John uses light and darkness as metaphors throughout. For instance, in the very first Chapter we are told that *“In [Jesus] was life, and that life is the light... and, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”*

Later, in John Chapter 3, Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees and a member of the Jewish ruling council “*came to Jesus at night.*” In other words, he came out of the darkness to the Light of Life.

Further along in that chapter Jesus says: “*Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light...*”

In the Gospel of John darkness represents chaos, despair, unbelief. Light represents truth, faith, salvation. And so, it was “still dark” when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. She was living in a state of chaos, despair and unbelief. And who could blame her? Just a few days earlier, she had watched as the person she had loved more than anyone in the world was tortured, and brutally murdered—as the Person Who had loved her more than anyone else had ever loved her was brutally killed and tortured!!!

We don’t know a whole lot about Mary Magdalene, but we are told that Jesus had healed her of 7 demons. We also know that she was one of His closest followers—even helping support His ministry financially. And she was one of a small handful of people who did not desert Him when He was arrested and crucified.

Instead, she stood sobbing near the Cross along with Jesus’ mother, Mary the wife of Clopas and the disciple John. She had heard Jesus say: “*It is finished*” as He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. She had seen the soldiers pierce Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. She had seen them take His lifeless body down from the Cross. And she knew where He had been buried. And now, all her hopes, all her dreams, the movement she had been part of had died along with Jesus.

And so, like so many mourners who go to visit the grave of a loved one, Mary headed to Jesus’ tomb to pay her respects. She would weep and wail. She would talk to Jesus, even though it would be more like just talking to herself. And she would remember. She would think about and remember all the good times, all the amazing healings, the laughter, the meals, the parables, the teachings, the excitement, the love.

After-all what else was she going to do? The meaning in her life had faded away. Her hope was gone. Her life was a bad mess. She was lost. She was walking in the darkness, moving toward the remains of the Only One Who had ever given her a reason to live—the Only One in Whom she had truly experienced light and clarity of thought.

But when she got to the tomb, things became even more chaotic as she saw that “*the stone had been removed from the entrance of [the tomb].*” And so she ran, in pitch black darkness, with tears streaming down her cheeks to tell Peter and John that Jesus’ body had been stolen!!!

And when they got to the tomb, we are told that they saw Jesus’ grave clothes, but no body. And John “*believed.*” What did he believe under the dark shroud of misunderstanding? He believed that someone had stolen Jesus’ body. “*Yes indeed. It was true.*”

Peter and John went back to their homes, we are told, but not Mary. Mary stayed and wept, and wept and wept. Her heart was completely broken. It must have ached in her chest. Have you ever had a heart ache? I have. They are real. I used to think it was just an expression until I experienced it for myself.

We are told that Mary “*saw two angels...seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and other at the foot.*” They even asked her, “*why are you crying?*” But she seems oblivious to the fact that they are

angels. Her tears, the alarm and anxiety that is running through her veins...the darkness of unbelief...blind her eyes to this.

Is it possible that in our darkness, in our misunderstanding and unbelief that we have been stumbling over angels as well? What do we miss when our minds are not focused on God—but rather the world and the things of the world?

She tells these angels that someone has stolen Jesus' body, and she turns away from them. And when she turns away, there is another figure standing in her line of sight. This figure is none other than Jesus Himself.

But the darkness, the veil of unbelief and incomprehension is so thick that she does not recognize Him. Her mind is not prepared to see the Resurrected Christ. I wonder how often we don't see Jesus working in our world due to the fact that our reality is simply too dark, our thinking is too shallow, our minds are too worldly.

How many times do we fail to recognize Jesus in the face of a needy stranger, a neglected child, a person of a different race or faith? How often do we not see Jesus in the face of the tired woman working behind the cash register at the grocery store early on a Sunday morning?

I bet most of us fail to see Christ in the face of someone who is lashing out at us due to their fear, their discouragement, their anxiety, or depression. It's so easy to miss Jesus when we are walking in the darkness. It's so easy to miss Jesus when our minds are fixed only on ourselves and our needs, our feelings, our desires, our egos. It's so easy to miss Jesus when we are only thinking about the physical, temporal and worldly. It's so easy to miss Jesus when we are consumed by the love of money and the striving for power. No wonder we live in a time of such unbelief!!!

Jesus is all around us. Jesus is everywhere. Do we see Him? Mary *"turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 'Woman,' he said, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'"*

But Mary thought she was looking at the gardener. She was, after-all, in a garden.

And she wasn't looking for a living Jesus, she was looking for a dead body.

*"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.'" At this, "Jesus said to her, "Mary."*

And suddenly, everything changed!!! And it happened when Jesus simply calls her name. It stops her in her tracks. The truth breaks through. The light smashes through the veil of darkness, and Mary runs for it with everything she's got!!!

And in John's Gospel this is the moment when the Resurrection is declared. No angels have announced that Jesus has risen. Jesus calling her name is the announcement. And it's not done by Jesus telling Mary Who He is, it's done by Jesus telling Mary who she is!!!

There is tremendous power in the speaking of a name. Your name is a sound, but it's much more than a sound: it is you! To be called by the wrong name is to be misidentified or not rightly known.

It's not Jesus' voice that Mary recognizes. If it were Jesus' voice, then Mary would have recognized Jesus right from the start. It's the sound of Mary's name coming from Jesus' voice that Mary recognizes. It's

the sound of her name from that voice, as the One Who understands her completely, and loves her more than she has ever known love that Mary recognizes. And this is the turning point. Nothing will ever be the same again!

And this is how it is for us as well, is it not? The world seems to be without meaning until God's love gives us meaning. And that is when everything is changed. Easter means that nothing will ever be the same again.

"But wait a minute," some folks may say. "I believe in the Resurrection, but it has never had much effect on my life." I can relate to that feeling. And when we are feeling that way, could it be that we are just like Mary in the garden, staring Jesus in the face but not recognizing Him?

The Resurrected Christ becomes real to us is when we too are Resurrected with Him. And this happens through the corrective lens of Resurrection faith put into action. It is when we leave behind the things of this world that hold us captive, and love our neighbors, pray for our enemies, turn the other cheek, feed the hungry, give a listening ear to the broken hearted, reach out to those on the margins that our own lives are Resurrected and we recognize the Resurrected Jesus.

And, oh, when that happens—we are alive in ways we never thought possible. The black and white of everyday life suddenly becomes techno-color!!! When REAL LOVE fills our hearts we are living in the Kingdom of heaven right here, right now.

Jesus wasn't the only One Resurrected on Easter morning. Mary experienced the Resurrection as well. The chaos, despair and unbelief of the darkness was gone as she ran to the Light of Life!!!

Mary held on to Jesus as soon as she recognized Him. But Jesus said, "*Do not hold on to me...*" In other words, "There can be no clinging to what was. Everything has become new!"

And then Jesus says a wonderful thing, "*I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*" Look at what has happened: The chasm which once stood between God and humankind has been bridged by the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ—God made flesh.

And so the children of the Resurrection can say: "*Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Jesus said to Mary, "*Go to my brothers and tell them...*" And so "*Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!'*" And that is what we are called to do...not just with our mouths, but with our entire lives.

When you and I love others we are declaring that we have seen Jesus. When you and I take the time to serve others we are declaring that we have seen Jesus. When you and I humble ourselves as we care for the sick, visit those in prison, give food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, water to the thirsty, and lift up the poor and weak we are living as witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus in our own lives and giving others an opportunity to lose the veil of death and see the Resurrected Christ in us. What could be better?

That is what REAL CHRISTIANITY is all about. That is why we are here this morning. That is what Christ has come to accomplish. He has come to make us new, to allow us to share in His Resurrection and thus to become who we really are—children of God. May it be so. Amen.