

“JESUS’ FATHER IS YOUR FATHER”

John 20:1-18

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Series A)

April 16, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Gospel for The Resurrection of Our Lord comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 20, verses 1 through 18. It is on page 768 of the pew Bible. Jesus lives, and it changes everything. Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From John 20, we begin reading at verse 1.

^{20:1} Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, **“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”** Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, **“Mary.”** She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, **“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”** ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Say it with me.

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This changes everything. Jesus is alive, and nothing will ever be the same.

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And it’s not simply that he is alive, but that he is alive *again* and *forever*. Three days earlier, Jesus was alive. But it’s different now. It’s not like things just went back to the way they were before—before that whole crucifixion thing happened. Jesus is alive, and things are radically different. They can’t go back to the way they were before.

This is different than the other people who came back from the dead. We think of Lazarus and the widow’s son and that little girl. Jesus brought them back to life and restored them to their families. Jesus basically just undid those deaths. He restored things to the way they were before. I mean, the experience was obviously meaningful and had a profound impact on them and on their families. I’m sure it gave them a new perspective on life, and it revealed Jesus’ power to them. But things basically just went back to the way they were before. Jesus just undid those deaths. He restored things to the way they were before.

But the resurrection of Jesus is different. Things are not the same as they were before. Things can never be the same. Jesus has fundamentally changed reality. He did not simply wind the clock back to the way things were before his death, or before his trial, or before his betrayal. The reality on that Sunday morning was different than the reality on Friday or even Thursday or any previous day for that matter. Jesus radically changed reality. And things will never be the same.

That Sunday morning started out in grief, and then it actually got worse before it got better.

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb very early in the morning, while it was still dark. The other gospel accounts inform us that there were other women with Mary Magdalene. They also tell us why they went to the tomb. They went there to anoint Jesus’ body with spices, in order to prepare him for burial.

John wrote his gospel probably a few decades after the other three gospels were written, so he assumes his readers already know this. They know the story of the empty tomb and the resurrection. They know there were other women there, and they know what the women came to do. So John’s not trying to retell the whole story. Instead, he’s zeroing in on Mary Magdalene’s experience, as well as a little bit of his own, which is kind of neat.

So Mary comes to the tomb very early in the morning. She’s still filled with grief from the events of Good Friday. As far as she knows, this Jesus whom she came to know as the Lord—that is, God in human flesh—as far as she knows, he is still dead. And she’s not expecting to see him alive again. She was expecting to see him dead. That, after all, is why she and the other women came to the tomb with spices. Jesus needed to be buried. Preparing the body was her solemn duty to her Lord and friend. It was to be her last act of devotion to him.

I don’t suppose it was something Mary really wanted to do. It wasn’t going to be a pleasant experience, especially with all those wounds and the torn flesh. Looking at that and handling that body would be ... just plain gut wrenching. But it would also be a blessed part of the grieving process. So despite the pain, she would have cherished this solemn responsibility. But then someone had to go and mess with her grieving process.

Mary comes to the tomb, and she finds the stone rolled away. She doesn’t seem to investigate any further. John doesn’t say anything about her finding the empty burial cloths. That, perhaps, would have gotten her thoughts on the right track. But she just runs to find Peter and John. John is the other unnamed disciple (20:2). He reveals that later in the gospel (21:24).

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So Mary runs and reports the horrifying news: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (20:2). Who would do such a thing? I mean, talk about disrespectful. Stealing the body of Jesus. This just adds further grief to Mary and the others who are just trying to mourn.

So Peter and John run to the tomb. John got there first. Apparently he was faster than Peter, and he wants us all to know it. But for whatever reason, he didn’t go in until Peter got there. Then they go in to the empty tomb—well, almost empty. The grave cloths were still there. And the face cloth was folded up in its own place. It doesn’t say what Peter thought about this sight, but John, at least, believed. Then they went home.

But Mary stayed there. She was weeping. She didn’t believe yet. When she finally stooped to look into the tomb, she saw two angels. But she doesn’t seem to recognize them as angels. If she had, that probably would have changed her outlook. And I don’t know why she doesn’t recognize them. Maybe it’s still kind of dark, maybe she had bad vision, or maybe her eyes were just filled with tears. It doesn’t really matter. They ask her why she’s crying, and she tells them. As if her Lord being dead weren’t tragic enough, someone had to steal the body. She doesn’t know what to do now.

Then Jesus himself comes up behind her. She turns and sees him, but doesn’t recognize him either. And he asks, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” (20:15). And Mary still doesn’t realize it’s Jesus. And it’s not like Jesus is trying to disguise himself. Mary just ... she watched him die. She saw him laid in this tomb. She’s filled with grief, and she’s not expecting to ever see him alive again or hear his voice. So she thinks he’s just some random stranger—probably the gardener. So she asks him if he knows where her Lord is. And this is really funny. She just asked Jesus if Jesus knows where Jesus is.

Now what do you say to that? Just one word: “Mary” (20:16). And then it all clicks. Her whole world changed. Well, it had already changed, but she’s just now realizing it. When Jesus spoke the words any stranger could have spoken, she didn’t think much of it. But when he speaks her name, well, it can’t be a stranger now. This is someone familiar. She recognizes the voice and who that voice belongs to. It’s like the voice of the Good Shepherd calling her by name (10:3). And when he calls her by name, then she recognizes his voice (10:4), and she finally understands what happened.

She recognizes him, and she clings to him. Jesus has to tell her to let go.

This is one of the many proofs in Scripture of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. He wasn’t a ghost or a hologram or a figment of her imagination. You can’t cling to someone who doesn’t have real flesh and blood. Jesus really stood there before her. The same body that died on that cross and was laid in the tomb is now alive. Mary was an ear-witness and an eyewitness and a hand-witness. She heard him, saw him, and even touched him. This was real. She was one of, literally, hundreds of witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6).

When we talk about the resurrection of Jesus, we’re not talking about some legend that developed over several hundred years. And we’re not talking about a conspiracy propagated by a few cunning individuals in order to gain power or wealth.

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Those are the criticisms often leveled against religious claims. And the critics might concede that religious beliefs have some value for individual persons and might comfort them, so long as no one actually thinks of them as history. That is, you can have your fairy tales, so long as you don’t actually think any of it is real.

And, quite honestly, you look at the religious claims for every other religion in the world, and there isn’t any proof. Someone heard from God or saw something miraculous or just felt something in their heart. But there isn’t any evidence, and there aren’t any eyewitnesses. It’s easy to see how other religious claims could fall into the category of legend or conspiracy.

Now that doesn’t necessarily prove them all false. But it does mean that you can’t prove them right. So what do we do with them? At best we can say these religious claims add meaning to someone’s life, but that doesn’t mean they’re actually true. And it certainly doesn’t mean it will save them eternally.

But then this approach to religious claims gets applied to the resurrection of Jesus, without stopping to consider whether or not it fits. And you know what? It doesn’t fit. The resurrection can’t be a legend that developed over hundreds of years. And it can’t be a conspiracy.

The reports of Jesus’ resurrection immediately spread throughout all of Israel, and soon to the entire ancient world. And it wasn’t just one or a few people who testified of it. There were hundreds. Now, obviously none of them are still alive for us to talk to. But in ancient Israel, you could track down Mary Magdalene or Peter or John or literally dozens—even hundreds—of other people, and you could get their firsthand testimony. That’s why so many of their names are recorded in Scripture—so you could go and ask them. And I know we can’t go and ask them now, but in ancient Israel, you could. And that matters to us, still, today. Because it proves it wasn’t a legend. It was a historical event with legitimate eyewitnesses.

And it couldn’t be a conspiracy either. No one gained power or wealth from it. In fact, so many of the first Christians, including the apostles, gained nothing for their earthly lives except persecution and, for so many, a premature death. You don’t die for something you know to be false.

The critical approach to religious claims just doesn’t work on the resurrection of Jesus. It is far more reasonable to believe the testimony of the multitude of witnesses—witnesses like Mary Magdalene, who had to be told to let go of Jesus’ living body.

Jesus is, most certainly, alive. And this changes everything.

So what does it change? Look at the last thing Jesus says to Mary: **“Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’ ”** (20:17).

This is different from how Jesus used to talk about his disciples and how he used to talk about the Father. Occasionally in the other three gospels, Jesus will speak of someone as his brother, or he might speak of God as **“Our Father”** or **“Your Father in heaven.”** But he doesn’t do that in *The Gospel of John*—not even once. John is very careful to reserve those terms until after the resurrection.

Jesus will go so far as calling his disciples, **“Friends.”** And this is a very high honor. On the evening before his crucifixion, he says, **“No longer do I call you servants ...; but I have called you friends”** (15:15). Now, being friends with the Son of God is really awesome. Maybe you’ll get to visit him in Heaven. But after the resurrection, Jesus calls his disciples something else. He calls them, **“Brothers.”** Now what does it mean to be a brother of the Son of God?

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Go ahead. Do the math. It means God is *your* Father. And that’s exactly what Jesus says. “**I am ascending to my Father and your Father.**” This is the first time in the Gospel of John that Jesus says anything like this. The only other time the words, “**Your father,**” are found on Jesus’ lips is when he accuses his adversaries of being children of the devil (8:44).

But now he uses the words, “**Your Father,**” to refer to God. This is the first time. And it’s not an accident; Jesus talks about the Father a lot in *The Gospel of John*. But until now, he never says, “**Your Father,**” or even, “**Our Father.**” It’s always “**The Father,**” or, “**My Father.**” Even on the evening before his crucifixion, when he’s just talking with his “friends,” he refers to God as, “**My Father.**” But now that Jesus has been crucified and has risen from the dead, there is a new reality. Something has changed. Jesus now refers to God the Father as “**My Father and your Father.**”

For every disciple of Jesus—not just the Twelve—but for all who believe in him, there is a new reality. His disciples are not mere servants. They are not even friends anymore. We are his brothers—children of the Heavenly Father and heirs of his entire inheritance.

Something has changed. Things are radically different. And it’s not just because Jesus is alive. It’s because he is alive *again* and *forever*. It is because he was crucified. He was condemned in our place. He was judged by God. He died in our place and was buried for us. He bore our sin and suffered our condemnation. He passed through death for us. It’s not simply that he is alive. It’s that he is alive *again* and *forever*. It is because he made atonement for sin. He “has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14). That sin, which made us enemies of God, has been atoned for. Forgiven. Removed. Buried with Christ. Never to rise again.

So there is a new reality. And the risen Jesus comes to proclaim it. “**Brothers ... My Father and your Father ... My God and your God.**”

The crucifixion of Jesus made peace with our Heavenly Father. And his resurrection is the guarantee that we will follow the same path as our elder brother and Lord Jesus Christ. We will be raised to a new reality, transformed in body and soul into his perfect image. And we will live and reign with him as brothers—co-heirs in the Kingdom of God.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Say it with me.

He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.