

## I Have Seen the Lord

### John 20:1-18

<sup>1</sup> Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because 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.'" <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Welcome again to worship at Unity Christian Church this Easter morning. We have gathered as a community to remind ourselves of the greatness of our God and the fact that we are not foolish people to believe that God worked the greatest miracle in human history.

Swiss theological giant Karl Barth said that what brings us to worship—not just on Easter, but any day—is an unspoken question clinging to their hearts and minds, and that question is simply this: "Is it true?" Is it true that God lives and gives us life? Is it true that God not only established a routine,

what we call the laws of nature, but that one day God broke the routine and somehow raised Jesus from the dead? Is it true that something so extraordinary happened on that morning that we can only rebuild our lives on its foundation? Is it true?

When we read the first sermons that were ever preached in the early church as recorded in Acts; they make no reference to Jesus' teachings. It is almost as if the story of his life is of interest only if we see it from the vantage point of Easter. Even Jesus' teachings are not seen as important in their own right, because there is little that is original in them. Rather, they take on meaning only when we take into full account who the teacher is, that is, God's chosen one who died and is raised again.

For the early followers of Jesus, the beginning point of Christian proclamation was the Easter event. Over and over the disciples started with proclamations about Easter, as if it were the only place to begin. Through the centuries Christians have begun our journey of faith by running to the empty tomb. As modern people, who like to think of ourselves as sophisticated, we sometimes forget that the idea that God could raise someone from the dead would be as difficult for these ancient people to believe as it is for us. These ancient people were not stupid. They had seen many people die and never once had they seen anyone come to life again, without someone resuscitating them.

Yes, there was something in the story to doubt. There is also another way to put it: there was something in the story that reached the deepest regions of their hearts and minds, where both doubt and faith are found. That is, in the resurrection God gave us such a miracle of love and forgiveness that it is worthy of faith, and thus open to doubt. (**Martin B. Copenhaver**) It is true

that God raised Jesus from the death that we might have salvation and life eternal. We are here to proclaim to the world that Jesus is “risen” as he said!

John's account of Easter morning stands in significant relief to the Synoptic Gospel accounts. So let us examine John's account of the Easter events; which include Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the other disciple—the one Jesus loves—two angels, and, finally, Jesus himself. Each comes and goes and runs to see; they bend down and go in, then they see. They also have expectations, they become confused, and they weep; then again, they see.

These are common people: a woman no better than she ought to be, a fisherman, another one whose name we are not even given. The angels are messengers of God to give additional information. One commentator said the account reads like a Greek comedy with a missing body and mistaken identity. It requires divine intervention in order to be resolved, and its resolution does not end the story; instead, the story opens outward toward what will happen next.

When Mary comes to the tomb, she finds the stone has been removed—“rolled back” or “away,” according to the Synoptics (Matt. 28:2; Mark 16:4; Luke 24:2). So, Mary ... runs away. She runs to Peter and the other disciple, the one without a name, and tells them that Jesus' body has gone missing.

The disciples set off immediately, running. It becomes a race: The other disciple outruns Peter, and he looks in and sees the cloths in which the body had been wrapped. Peter *goes* in to see what is going on—or is not! Then the other disciple goes in as well, where he can better see, and—having seen—he believes, though what he believes is not clear. The tomb is empty, but who, at this point, can say why? None of them knows yet that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Mary must have run with or right behind the disciples, for she is there at the tomb when they leave to return home. She remains, weeping. Then she bends down to look into the tomb herself; but the tomb is no longer empty. Rather, "where the body of Jesus had been lying" (v. 12)—sit two angels. The angels want to know why Mary is weeping. Because, she says, they have taken Jesus' body away, and she does not know where. Then, she turns around and sees—where *nothing* was before—a man standing behind her. Oh! The man—he must be the gardener—asks her also why she is weeping. She has been peering into an empty tomb. What is she looking for? Mary says, in effect, that it does not matter why she is crying; but if the gardener has taken him away, just tell her where, so she can get him back. She does not recognize to whom she is speaking until she is called by name. Then she knows him. She speaks to him: "Teacher" (v. 16), and reaches out to take hold of him, before he somehow gets away again, goes missing, so she cannot find him.

He tells her, however, not to hold on: he *is* going away, again. Tell my brothers, he says to Mary, that "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (v. 17). Jesus' words—"my Father and your Father, my God and your God"—recall other words, from Jesus' last conversation with his disciples. In that conversation too, Jesus promised that even as he went away, he would remain with his disciples in the Spirit (e.g., 14:16-17, 26; 15:26).

Thus, our reading ends, but the story will continue. Jesus will also give his disciples the Spirit, breathing it into them, in the story that follows this one (20:19-23). This Spirit not only blows where it wills (3:8), but it will blow the followers of Jesus where it wills. An Easter faith cannot hang on.

So Mary lets go. She goes, as Jesus tells her, to carry the news to the disciples, *her* news. You may have seen the empty tomb, Mary says, but "I have seen the Lord." So she has. Will we also *see*, and believe? (**Richard S. Dietrich**)

*"Mary Magdalene Went and Announced ... 'I Have Seen the Lord'"* (v. 18). This was the first sermon. It is delivered by a woman. She saw and believed and announced. She did not require ordination or an accredited preaching course. She required only a word from Jesus. Then she went and told. Here is the message for us: Christ is risen—go tell someone.

*"Go to My Brothers and [Tell] Them"* (v. 17). Listen, you who come to Easter services, who see the stone rolled away, who hear the trumpets and the report of the angels: go to the people and tell them. This is how the word spreads. It depends on us, as it depended on Mary.

We, as Mary, proclaim that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. (**Clayton J. Schmit**)

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