

I Have Seen the Lord!

John 20:1-31

Key Verse: 20:18

By Joshua Jeon

“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’”

Happy Easter! It is the day to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection is a big deal - not just for Christians but for everyone. Today’s passage is John’s account of Jesus’ resurrection. John was not writing an allegory or a parable, but rather history - something that happened in time and space.

I recently met with a friend over coffee, and she expressed why she could not be a Christian. She talked about how Christians she met were hypocrites, too pushy; how hard it was to find a church where she fit in. I don’t think she was exaggerating. But still, she wasn’t asking the right question. It really comes down to this question, “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” It is Jesus’ resurrection that changes everything. And it is meeting the Risen Jesus that changes us. In John 20, we see three meetings with Jesus after he rose from the dead. (1) Jesus meets with Mary, (2) Jesus meets with the disciples, and (3) Jesus meets with Thomas.

First, Jesus meets with Mary (1-18). Verse 1 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.”

Jesus died Friday afternoon. Not long after he was taken down from the cross, Sabbath began. It was mandatory rest till sunset Saturday. No doubt, there was no rest for Mary Magdalene and others who loved Jesus. Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary headed for the tomb.

Who was this Mary? The first mention of Mary is in Luke 8 , which reads, **“Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out.”** Mary at one time was demon possessed by seven demons. What a scary thought. Can you imagine seven foreign spirits resident in you? She was never by herself. These evil spirits were always with her - speaking to her, tormenting her. What could be her joy in life? What could her life amount to? This is when Jesus found her and drove these other spirits out and freed her. She had new life because of Jesus. The religious leaders

I Have Seen the Lord!

may have rejected Jesus, but Mary experientially knew that Jesus had to be the Messiah.

The next time we hear of Mary Magdalene in the gospels is when she is beneath the cross of Jesus (Jn 19:25). How shocking and unbearable this must have been to her. Just overnight, they took Jesus, beat him, flogged him, then nailed him to a cross. Jesus was dying, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing she could do about it. She could only be there and watch him die.

So early Sunday morning, Mary was the first to come to the tomb. Jesus was the world to her. This was the last bit of Jesus she could hold onto before he was gone forever. When it seemed things couldn't get any worse, when she got there, Mary found that Jesus' body was gone. This was like a stake through her heart. She turned around and ran to Peter and John and said, **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"** Mary probably thought the same religious leaders that killed Jesus now stole his body.

Peter and John ran for the tomb. In verses 3-10, John includes so many details. Details like how they were both running but John gets there first, and how he looks in and sees strips of linen lying there but did not go in; and how Peter, though he gets there later, goes right in and also sees the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was still in its place, separate from the linen. All the details are there to show that they were really there, and that they both saw the empty tomb and the cloth and linen lying there. The word "lying" is better translated folded up. Who would, while stealing Jesus' body, take the time and trouble to unwrap the body and fold up the linen? John and Peter became eye witnesses of Jesus' empty tomb. Theirs was a valid testimony according to the Jewish law, which requires two male witnesses. John writes, **"He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)"** So though they did not know that this meant Jesus had risen from the dead, they verified that the tomb was empty!

The empty tomb is a factual, historical evidence that people of every generation has had to deal with. Mary and others were there to see Jesus die on the cross. Nicodemus and Joseph were there to lay the dead body of Jesus in a new tomb. But Sunday morning, the tomb was empty, and Jesus' body was not there. This is unique to Jesus' tomb. The Prophet Mohammed is buried in Medina. Buddha is buried in Kushinagar. Confucius is buried in Qufu. All these men taught many things and were influential. But in the end, they proved to be one of us. They

I Have Seen the Lord!

succumbed to death. They are still there in their grave. But Jesus' tomb is empty. We each must come to grips with the meaning of the empty tomb.

Peter and John went back to where they were staying. But Mary stayed behind. She stood outside the tomb crying. The word "crying" or "wept" appears 4 times here. Mary was really sorrowful. 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, "Woman, why are you crying?" She said, "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him." (11-13)** Mary was so sorrowful that she was not impressed even with angels. Verse 14 says, **"At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus."** It was Jesus, but Mary could not see it. **Jesus asked her the same question, "Woman, 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."** Mary could not recognize Jesus because of her sorrow. **She kept saying, "I don't know where they have put him."** She thought her problem was that she couldn't find the dead body of Jesus.

But why was she really sorrowful? Wasn't it because she was under the oppression of death? Death is a cruel ruler, and it is ruled mankind up to this point (Ro 5:14). No one, however vibrant their life, however bold their statements, fails to bow down to death. Frank Sinatra sang pompously, "And now, the end is near; And so I face the final curtain. My friend, I'll say it clear, I'll state my case, of which I'm certain. I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled each and ev'ry highway; But more, much more than this, I did it my way." He claimed he lived a full life, but on his death bed, his last words were this: "I'm losing." Late in life he thought he had won, but when death was at hand, he knew he had lost. Man is always a loser before death. This death had Mary in a strong grip. That's why she was sorrowful. These days, people think any mention of death is inappropriate. We entertain ourselves to the point that we don't have to think about death, and pretend that we will never die. Others process death differently. They think death will be less painful or traumatic if they live a good life. So they devote themselves to humanism. But death's trauma cannot be reduced. Fatalism lies in each of our hearts. What we need is not a new way of looking at death but a real solution to death.

Verse 16 says, **"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher')."** Mary's eyes were opened when Jesus, her Good Shepherd (Jn 10), called out her name. She finally

I Have Seen the Lord!

saw him. It was Jesus! It was her Jesus standing right in front of her! Jesus had risen from the dead. All this time, she had no reason to cry. The one she was mourning was alive. Jesus is alive!

Mary must have thought she had Jesus back for good. She would never let him out of her sight. But Jesus told her, **“Do not hold onto me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”** Jesus was telling her that he would not stay in the flesh like this for long. This was not a human reunion. The resurrection of Jesus looked forward to Jesus’ ascension, and to the time when all things will be put under Jesus when he would reign. The resurrection of Jesus looks forward to the kingdom of God.

Jesus gave Mary a message to give to the disciples. He said, **“Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”** This message is the gospel message, that because Jesus died for our sins and rose from dead for our justification, we can have a Father-son relationship with God. We have been adopted as God's children. We are invited into the relationship that Jesus has with God. Ephesians 4:12 says, **“In [Jesus] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”** God is our Father and our God through Jesus. What a beautiful message Mary got to tell the disciples.

Let’s read verse 18 together: **“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.”** Mary became the first person to see the risen Jesus and to tell someone else that she saw Jesus. Mary’s words were, **“I have seen the Lord.”** It is seeing the Risen Jesus that changes our lives forever. Mary was sorrowful, trying to hold onto the dead body of Jesus. Is there some sorrow in our hearts? Is it possible that whatever sorrow we have is related to the power of sin and death in our lives? Seeing the Risen Jesus changes our deepest sorrow to joy. My dad died when he was only in his 30’s after two years of paralysis. But in his short life, he also met the Risen Jesus. On his deathbed, he didn’t say “I’m losing.” As he heard his brothers and sisters in Christ singing hymns, he made huge a smile and died. At the wake, his smile still hadn’t faded. He died a winner because his death gave way to eternal life because of Jesus, who died and rose again from the dead! Praise Jesus who rose from the dead and gives us the victory over death!

Second, Jesus meets with his disciples (19-23). Jesus appeared to his disciples that evening. The disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. They were afraid that they also might be dragged off like Jesus and

I Have Seen the Lord!

killed. Their fear wasn't unfounded. Because of their association with Jesus, the religious leaders probably were looking for them to arrest them.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, **"Peace be with you!"** Jesus' first words to them weren't, "Hey, where were you guys?" It was, **"Peace be with you!"** The last they saw of Jesus was when they deserted him. But Jesus blessed them with peace. Jesus said **"Peace be with you!"** three times in this passage. This peace, simply put, is saying, "Everything is going to be alright." Jesus had risen from dead. Their sins were forgiven. They had peace with God. Death was not the end. God really was in control. They had hope in the kingdom of God. They had every reason now to have peace. There may be trouble in this life, but Jesus has overcome the world. Jesus overcame death. In Jesus, we can always find the peace of God. When the disciples saw Jesus, they were overjoyed. Their fear was completely obsolete, and instead, joy filled their hearts.

Jesus showed his disciples his hands and side. It really was Jesus. His crucifixion wounds were still there. Jesus made his disciples eye witnesses of his resurrection. Let's read verse 21 together. **"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'" What now - now that the disciples saw Jesus risen from the dead? Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."** Jesus was sending the disciples! This is a part of the resurrection message. Jesus was sending disciples as he was sent. John 3:16 says, **"For God so loved the world that he gave[, that he sent] his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** Jesus was sent to show the love of God to people. It wasn't what people expected. Jesus embraced broken people. Jesus had hope for outcasts. Jesus called ordinary people and they became his disciples. Jesus gave words of life, not just free food. Then Jesus laid down his life on his own accord that he may give life to world. Jesus said, **"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."** This had been Jesus' discipleship plan all along. He wasn't going to stay with them forever. Jesus was sent to them. He loved them. He gave them God's words. And now he was sending them as witnesses of his death and resurrection. Our imitation of Jesus was never meant to stop at character development. We get to imitate Jesus in his sentness. Jesus said in John 13, **"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."** Being sent is a part of being Jesus' disciple because Jesus was sent. There is this temptation the longer we are Christians, the more we know - whether it's theology or learning from our mistakes - to keep raising the bar on when people should be sent. We naturally want to hold people and prepare them real well, and then send them. But being sent is not the end product of discipleship but a part of discipleship. The best way to learn Jesus and to keep on growing in him is

I Have Seen the Lord!

to imitate Jesus in his sentness. When we try to love even one person like Jesus, even though we know little, we can grow in Jesus.

To be sent doesn't mean that we have to leave and go somewhere else geographically. We can be sent "here," where we are. But this does mean we have to leave one thing. We do have to leave our church bubble. All our friends can't be Christians. All our dinner guests can't be church friends. We must always be making friends with those who aren't Christians. We must be serving them, hanging out with them, trying to bless them somehow. This is what it looks like to be sent. There is this one family at UIC that is really living the sent life. They are busy with school studies and raising young kids. They struggle to make ends meet. But they are always engaged in reaching out to unchurched people - whether on UIC campus or on Warren Park's tennis courts. They have people live with them, eat with them, play with their kids. This is beautiful, and God is using them to build up the kingdom of God.

Verse 22 says, **"And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"** Jesus gave his disciples the Holy Spirit that they may be able live the sent life Jesus did without fear. We see the disciples earlier in this passage fearfully hiding from the Jewish leaders because of what might be done to them. But when the Holy Spirit comes on them, their fear is gone and they ignore the threats of the religious leaders and speak the word of God boldly. Without the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing. We can love people till we're totally spent. But ultimately, we can't change them. We can't change the world. But the Holy Spirit can. The Apostle Paul knew this and said, **"Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."** (1Cor3:7)

Verse 23 says, **"If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** Jesus was entrusting his disciples with the ministry of forgiveness. Forgiveness is what the gospel is all about. Jesus died praying, **"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."** Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can be forgiven of all our sins and live with a cleansed conscience. You can't buy that with a million dollars. It is God's gift to us in Jesus. What a beautiful message we get to tell others. We get to tell people that God forgives their sins in Jesus. We get to tell them that God is their Father and their God. Preaching the message of forgiveness must be our focus.

So we see a huge turnaround in the disciples. They were enslaved by fear, hiding in their house. But meeting the Risen Jesus made them overjoyed. Their fear

I Have Seen the Lord!

was gone. Are we functioning out of fear? Or are we functioning out of the joy of meeting the Risen Jesus? Are we living in this world as those Jesus has sent, empowered by the Holy Spirit, relaying the message of forgiveness? Or are we too fearful to engage our culture?

If we're honest, there is fear in our hearts. Our culture is very resistant to the gospel message. Especially in Chicago, we don't live in a Christian culture. We get labeled and ostracized at work and at school for really believing the gospel. It's true. At my workplace, there is a real consensus on all social issues. If you're not a democrat, you're a terrible person. They also agree that Christians are bigots and superstitious, unthinking people. It is frightening to hold out the gospel in such a climate. But what are we gonna do? Jesus sends us into the world. His heart is broken for these people who are lost and don't know it. When we meet with the Risen Jesus, he gives us his peace and the Holy Spirit that we may overcome fear and relay the message of forgiveness to the people around us. Recently, God has convicted me about shrinking back because of fear. The thing is, it's super awkward to talk about Jesus. But there's no way around it. We can't just tweet the gospel message or post a facebook status about it and think that that can change the world. We have to talk to people and listen to them and love them. So at work, I'm starting to talk to people more about Jesus, asking God for more opportunities for it. And he's answering this prayer. May Jesus' peace and the Holy Spirit give us the courage to live as sent people of Jesus.

Third, Jesus meets with Thomas (24-31). When Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas wasn't there. The disciples told him, **"We have seen the Lord!"** It was 10 to 1 - but Thomas stubbornly refused to believe. He said, **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."** Thomas must have thought that he had reason to doubt since he didn't get to see Jesus for himself like the other disciples. But here are some questions Thomas should have asked himself – "What if I never get to see Jesus? Would it be any less true? Why can't I believe based on what my friends are saying?" In fact, Jesus wanted Thomas to have believed based on the other disciples' testimonies. But Thomas doubted and refused to believe. Jesus was gracious to him and visited the disciples a week later when Thomas was with them. Jesus told Thomas, **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** (26-27) Thomas said to Jesus, **"My Lord and my God!"**

When Thomas made his confession, Jesus said, **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have**

I Have Seen the Lord!

believed.” (29) What does this blessing mean? Not too long ago, I remember wishing that I was part of this first generation of disciples who got to be eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. I wished this because I thought then my faith would be more legitimate. But Jesus assures us here that there is the same blessing for us who believe just through hearing. In fact, we are more blessed for it. Isn’t this way the kingdom of God has been growing and growing? Ever since the first generation of eye witnesses, it has always been hearing, believing, and then telling others. Not seeing. Jesus promised to bless us for hearing and believing, and indeed he does. We don’t see him, but we know him. He reveals himself to us. He pours out his love into our hearts. We experience his joy. He gives us the Holy Spirit and speaks to us.

Thomas’ confession, **“My Lord and my God,”** is the very confession John wants his readers to come to. Verse 31 says, **“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** John made no apologies for his purpose here. He wanted everyone to hear and then believe that Jesus, who died for us and rose from the dead is the Messiah, the Son of God. By believing, we have life in his name.

Mary and I have come to experience this life in Jesus by God’s grace working in us. We have come to believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. God has given us a clear calling to be witnesses of Jesus’ down in Austin, that they may also believe and have life in Jesus’ name. Austin’s motto is, “Keep Austin Weird.” Austin has recently become the rallying ground for artists, young educated professionals, and all kinds of weird people. We know that holding out the gospel in such a place will not be easy, but they need life in Jesus’ name more than anything. Please pray for our family that God may work to sprout faith everywhere as we live as his witnesses day in and day out, and that life in Jesus’ name may abound in Austin among their young people.