

Text: John 20:1-29¹

Series: Life in His Name – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 42 -- Life-Changing Encounters with the Risen Jesus

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Date: January 8, 2012

In the Scripture that we’re about to read together I want you to be on the lookout for two key words: **“saw” and “believed.”** In this section of his Gospel John is setting the stage for the declaration of the purpose of his Gospel...

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31

Throughout his Gospel John has been setting out “signs” for us to see:

- the turning of water into wine (John 2)
- the provision of bread in the desert (John 6)
- the healing of a man born blind (John 9)
- the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11)

These signs are intended to point us to belief in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God.” In the passage we’re about to read, John brings us to one last sign – the greatest sign of them all – the resurrection of Jesus! (cf. John 2:18-22) What we’re going to see today are a series of...

Life-Changing Encounters with the Risen Jesus!

John’s purpose in recounting these stories is that we also might “see” and “believe” in Jesus.

This is God’s holy, inspired and authoritative Word. Let’s hear it with reverence and faith and with an ear to what God is speaking into our own lives.

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

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.

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.

The Reality of Jesus' Resurrection

John "saw and believed"

John 20:1-10

NB. **John** is mentioned by name in his Gospel = "**the one whom Jesus loved**" & "**the other disciple.**" John records tells us that...

1) Mary Magdalene "saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." (v.1)

She's thrown into a **panic** – convinced that someone has removed Jesus' body from the tomb & taken it away

"The have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." (v.2)

Notice her belief that someone has stolen Jesus' body! It becomes a **consuming conviction** and we'll see it repeated three times in the verses that we'll read this morning.

One of the things that argues for the truth of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) is that they record **very human responses to the empty tomb!**

Mary Magdalene was **shocked** by the fact that the stone had been rolled away and she looked for a **human explanation** for the empty tomb

Notice **the human touches** of John's account:

- **Mary's shock** at the fact that the stone was rolled away (v.1)
- Her haste to find Peter & John and enlist their aid in **helping her find** the body of Jesus (v.2)
- **The race** between John and Peter to get to the tomb – which John tells us that he won (how human!) – it's simply a record of what really happened (v.4)

- The honest acknowledgement by John that they were mystified by the resurrection because they **didn't understand that the Scripture** had foretold that Jesus "must rise from the dead." (v.9)
- That Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the empty tomb – **a woman AND woman from whom Jesus had cast our seven evil spirits** (Luke 8:2) (v.1)

John is simply telling us what people saw and how they reacted to it -- His point is that their **experience preceded their understanding** – they weren't reading into these things what the Bible told them to see or what they wanted to see; they were **simply "seeing" what they saw** and were unable to understand it as yet. It was only **later** that their **understanding caught up with their experience**

Mary had a human explanation for the fact she saw that the stone was missing – somebody had rolled it away! **On deeper reflection**, however, one wonders who it could have been:

- Could it have been **the authorities**? Unlikely – to stop the Jesus movement that grew following the resurrection, all they would have had to do was produce the corpse, the movement would have died!
- Could it have been **grave robbers**? Unlikely – Matthew tells us that a squad of Roman soldiers had been set to guard against the body being removed.
- Could it have been **the disciples**? Well, **you tell me after we walk through this passage** whether or not you think the disciples had the courage after Jesus' death and burial to roll that stone away.

The question stands: Who moved the stone?

The missing stone could conceivably have had a human explanation BUT the **second thing** that John tells us that was "seen" that morning was something that **defied human explanation!**

2) Peter & John looked into the tomb of Jesus and "saw" the folded grave clothes

- John arrives first – he looks in without going into the tomb and "saw the linen cloths lying there." (v.5)
- Peter arrives and goes into the tomb:

"He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself." John 20:6-7

When I was a child I remember thinking: "Oh, how neat of Jesus. He folded up the linen strips and neatly left them there. How orderly and tidy!" But, of course, that isn't what John is saying.

Jesus' body was wrapped with strips of linen cloth – his head was wrapped with linen strips, separately from his body – like a turban. The image is of the cloths in place as if **the body has simply passed through them and they lie undisturbed.**

Cf. John Stott used a powerful image to describe the scene: 'like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged'.² The linen case lay there, **empty!**

“Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;” John 20:8

NB. It wasn't the emptiness of the tomb that convinced John that Jesus was alive – it was **the emptiness of the grave clothes!** John “saw” the empty grave clothes and reasoned, **“Jesus is alive!”**

- Alone of all the disciples, John comes to believe that Jesus is alive even before he has seen him – he's convinced by the empty grave cloths.

But the story that John tells us in His Gospel is about more than a missing stone and a missing body ... it's the story of a living, resurrected Jesus Christ!

The **most powerful testimonies** to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus are the life-changing stories that come from disciples who met the risen Lord.

First of all, let's catch up with Mary because in her story we discover that...

**The Reality of Jesus' Resurrection Transformed a Woman who
was Consumed with Grief
Mary Magdalene “saw and believed”
John 20:11-18**

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.”

²J. R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, (IVP, ²1971), p. 54.

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.

Notice the **consuming** nature of Mary’s grief...

1) Mary is “wailing” outside Jesus’ tomb (v.11)

Not polite sniffing stifled with a hanky – she is wailing! cf. Morris “the noisy lamentations typical of Easterners of that day.”

Her tears are so deep that even the unexpected presence of two beings dressed in white inside the tomb doesn’t stop it! The appearance of these two beings clearly identifies them as **angels** BUT her grief over the death of Jesus has so shut her down that she seems to barely notice them.

They ask her: “**Woman, why are you weeping?**” (v.13)

Bruce Milne’s comment:

From the perspective of heaven nothing is more incongruous than tears at the empty tomb of Jesus. If there is one place in space and one moment in time when tears are least appropriate, it is at the empty tomb of Jesus on Easter morning!²

Later, when Jesus appears in the garden, he asks her the same question: “Woman, why are you weeping?” (v.15)

2) Mary repeats her conviction: They’ve taken Jesus! (v.2, 13, 15)

To the angels: “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have laid him.” (v.13)

To Jesus: “**“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”** (v.15)

NB. This is **the third time** she’s repeated her belief that Jesus has been stolen away! Her **grief** is becoming **deeply fixed!**

I want you to picture of the physical location of the actors in this drama:

²Bruce Milne, *The Message of John : Here Is Your King! :with Study Guide*, The Bible speaks today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 291.

- The angels are inside the tomb, sitting at either end of the burial platform
- Mary is standing at the door
- Jesus is standing behind her in the garden, outside the tomb

- Mary has looked into the tomb -- the angels have asked her why she is weeping -- she answers them

- Then she senses that someone is behind her – she turns to see a man -- she doesn't recognize Jesus, she assumes he is the gardener

- He asks her why she is weeping -- she answers him and turns back toward the tomb – and then from behind she hears...

“Mary!” John 20:16

- She turns back to him and falls at his feet.

For Mary it wasn't the missing stone or the empty tomb; it wasn't the empty grave clothes; it wasn't even her eyes that convinced her that Jesus was alive – it was that voice!

Jesus spoke about the power of his voice in the lives of his people. He called himself the “good shepherd” and he spoke about how he used his voice to call together his sheep. The good shepherd, he said,

“calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” John 10:3-4

The voice of Jesus broke through the wall of her grief and she fell at his feet, and grabbed hold of him for all she was worth and said...

“Rabboni! (which means Teacher)” John 20:16

But Jesus tells her to loosen her grip! **“Do not cling to me...”**

- It's not that Jesus is in some strange state that can't be touched – in v.27 he tells Thomas to touch him!
- the Ascension of Jesus – the time when he would finally leave this world and go to the Father was some weeks away – he wasn't going to disappear on Mary!

I think D.A. Carson has the right idea. He wrote...

*The thought ... might be paraphrased this way: “Stop... holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended ... to my Father ... so **you do not have to hang on to me as if I were about to disappear permanently.** This is a time for joy and sharing the good news, not for clutching me as if I were some jealously guarded*

*private dream-come-true. Stop clinging to me, but ... go and tell my disciples that I am in process of ascending ... to my Father and your Father.*³

He **sends her off to share the good news** of the resurrection! And the measure of healing she had from her grief is seen in the simple fact that she goes and declares to the other disciples...

“I have seen the Lord” John 20:18

Let me stop and share a thought from Bruce Milne that has convicted my own heart. As he reflected on Jesus’ commission to Mary he wrote...

*Tragically, over the centuries the Christian community has shown a far greater interest in sitting at Jesus’ feet, holding on to him amid the comfort of his presence, than in going out into the world to share the good news of the risen Lord with broken, needy hearts who have as valid a claim to know of him as we.*⁴

Are we so consumed with our own problems that we have no time to share God’s grace with others in need? Are we clinging to Jesus when we should be sharing the comfort of God with others? Paul wrote...

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Meeting the resurrected Jesus transformed grief-stricken Mary into a messenger of the Gospel!

John presents us with a **second story of life-changing transformation.**

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 644.

⁴Bruce Milne, *The Message of John : Here Is Your King! :with Study Guide*, The Bible speaks today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 292.

**The Reality of Jesus' Resurrection Liberated Disciples Who
Were Bound With Fear
The Disciples "saw and believed"
John 20:19-23**

Mary's testimony wasn't enough for the disciples. They weren't easily convinced because something powerful was sweeping through their spirits: they were gripped with **fear**.

Even though Mary had told them of her experience; even though John had possibly reported to them of his conviction that Jesus was alive, the rest of the disciples were in hiding behind locked doors...

"for fear of the Jews" John 20:19

Let me tell you, fear can lock you up!

Cf my experience climbing the ranger tower in Northern Ontario

But suddenly, even behind locked doors, **Jesus was there!**

- cf. passing through doors just like he passed through the grave cloths

He spoke to them, just as he had spoken to Mary: "Peace be with you." (v.19) Just as Mary's grief can be seen in the repetition of the question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" the **disciples' deep fear** can be seen in **Jesus' repetition** of his greeting...

"Peace be with you." (v.19, 21)

They needed peace and so...

**"he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad
when they saw the Lord." John 20:20**

They were hiding because they feared "the Jews" – they had killed Jesus!
BUT Jesus shows them the nails holes in his hands & the spear gash in his side – this was the worst his enemies could do to him, and now he is alive!

But the peace he gave to them wasn't for them alone. Just as he commissioned Mary to carry the message of the resurrection, he **commissioned his disciples** to **leave the security of the locked room** and carry the message of the Gospel to those who needed God's forgiveness.

In the coming years, **virtually every disciple in that room would die** carrying the message of the resurrected Jesus and the forgiveness of God offered in the cross. And they would carry the message and **preach it with boldness**, even in

the face of death, **because of what happened in that room that day**. They had seen Jesus overcome the worst that the world could throw at him and in the coming years, **as they grew to understand** that Jesus' resurrection was the promise that they too would rise from the dead, their courage in the preaching of the Gospel grew.

Again, let's just pause for a moment and consider what this might mean for us. **Are we "locked up" behind a wall of fear** that is keeping us from sharing the Gospel of Jesus? **Are we hiding in the church**, hoping that the world will leave us alone or that the world will come to us? The risen Jesus' says to us...

"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." John 20:21

I remember seeing a sign hanging over the exit doors of one church that read: **"You are now entering the mission field."** We have been by God on mission to the people with whom we work, the students with whom we study, the teammates with whom we play, the neighbours with whom we live, the friends and families with whom we share life, to carry the message of forgiveness and new life that can only be found in the risen Jesus.

John tells one more story of a life-changing encounter with the risen Jesus.

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

**The Reality of Jesus' Resurrection Won over a Man Who
Demanded Evidence
Thomas "saw and believed"
John 20:24-28**

"We have seen the Lord" (v.25) -- **BUT the doors are still locked!** (v.26) – their faith needed to grow ... the disciples needed to fully come to grips with what the resurrection meant – And so do we.

Perhaps, if the disciples had not been meeting behind locked doors Thomas might have believed their testimony! But instead, he said: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails...I will never believe.”

Then eight days later, suddenly, as before, Jesus came through the locked doors. He invited Thomas to do exactly as he had said...

“Put your finger here, and see... Do not disbelieve, but believe.” John 20:27

Thomas saw and believed: **“My Lord and my God!” John 20:28**

Thomas wasn't a hardened cynic. He just needed evidence. “See” and “believe.” **Jesus invited Thomas to “examine the evidence.”** I want you to notice something: although Jesus had not been in the room when Thomas had uttered his challenge, **Jesus had heard it!** And he hadn't been offended by it.

Thomas is the first in a long line of people who have examined the evidence of the resurrection and have come to belief in the risen Jesus. Earlier I asked the question: **Who moved the stone?** I asked you to think about whether the disciples had the courage to do it. What do you think now? Did grief-stricken, fear-bound, unbelieving disciples move the stone?

Frank Morison was an American lawyer who set out to write a book to debunk the resurrection but who, in the process, came to faith in the risen Jesus. His book was titled, *“Who Moved the Stone?”* and it begins with a chapter that bears the interesting title: **“The Book That Refused to Be Written.”** In that chapter he writes that he had initially planned a book that would strip out the miraculous from the story of Jesus, but that after studying the Biblical material it's “irresistible logic” finally brought him to faith in the risen Jesus.

Lee Strobel, an American journalist, set out to study the Jesus his wife had come to believe in. Using his training as a court reporter, he did his research. He read the Biblical story and interviewed Biblical scholars, evaluating the evidence for and against the risen Jesus. After all was said and done, he **followed the evidence trail to faith in Christ** and wrote, *The Case for Christ*.

What about you and me?

John 20:29

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

You could well say this morning: “That's all fine for the disciples in Jesus' day! After all, they “saw” the risen Jesus. But what about me?”

I want you to notice something back at the beginning of John's account of Jesus' resurrection. John tells us...

“Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” John 20:8-9

John is almost apologetic about the fact that he was led to believe in the risen Jesus by the empty grave cloths rather than by the Old Testament Scripture that foretold his resurrection. What John is saying is that **a faith based upon the testimony of God's Word is superior to a faith based upon the testimony of our own experience.** Today, we have God's Word to examine and I invite you to “see” what it has to say about Jesus.

If you are unable to join Thomas in his declaration of faith in the risen Jesus I want to invite you to examine the evidence of God's Word and I want to provide you with a couple of alternatives.

First of all, I want to give you a book you can read that sifts through the Scripture and pulls together the essential story about Jesus. It's entitled, ***The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*** and if you'd like a copy of the book and the study guide that goes with it just ask the people at the Welcome Desk in the foyer for a copy. The book is free of charge.

Second, starting on **Wednesday, February 1,** I'll be leading an eight-week study in the Gospel of Mark entitled, “***Christianity Explored.***” We'll addressing three key questions:

- Who is Jesus?
- Why did he come?'
- What does it mean to follow him?

You don't need to know anything about the Bible. You won't be asked to read aloud, to pray or to sing. If you need a Bible, we'll provide one for you. There's no cost. I simply want to invite you to examine the evidence for Jesus.

What about those of us who do believe in the risen Jesus?

Let me suggest this morning that we need to apply the truth of the risen Jesus to our lives every day. Just as the disciples who continued to meet behind locked doors even though they had seen the risen Jesus, **our faith in the risen Jesus can become a purely intellectual thing. It needs to become practical.**

Let me close with a testimony of how the risen Jesus became a practical reality in one man's life. In his book, *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel interviewed New Testament scholar, Gary Habermas, an expert in the Biblical material on the resurrection. This is Gary's story...

In 1995 my wife, Debbie, had the flu. When it didn't go away as quickly as it should have, we went to the hospital for tests. The first sentence I remember that the doctor uttered to Debbie was, "You've got some serious problems here."

My heart sank into my stomach, and both turned instantly to water. I had to sit down. Little did I know that my belief in Jesus' resurrection was about to be severely tested by the sting of pain and grief. Debbie was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Four months later, at the age of 43 years, she passed away just after we celebrated our twenty-third wedding anniversary. I had lost my best friend...

During Debbie's suffering, I regularly took refuge in the truth of Jesus' resurrection. It had been my major research area for 25 years, and I appreciated a student who asked, "What would you do now if Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead?"

I knew that the resurrection had a historical, theoretical side, but I wasn't fully aware of its practical power....

Jesus' bodily resurrection occupies the very center of the Christian faith. After he died on the cross to pay for our sins, Jesus was raised from the dead. He appeared to many people in his physical body that was now immortal...

How did all this help me while Debbie was dying? I imagined what God might say to me in response to my questions about Debbie. He would ask me, "Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?"

"Of course you did, Lord," I would respond. "But why is Debbie dying?"

"Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?" the question would come again.

"Yes, Lord, but?"

"Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?"

I imagined God repeating the same question until I got his point. There was an answer to Debbie's suffering, even if I didn't know it. If Jesus has been raised, then I can trust that Debbie will be raised someday too.

It was sufficient to know that because of Jesus' resurrection, and because Debbie and I belong to Jesus, then we will be together again—for all eternity! (© 2008 PreachingToday.com Gary Habermas, author; this article was taken from Decision magazine, April, 2000; © 2000 Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, used by permission, all rights reserved)

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31

- **The Lord’s Table**
- **Welcome of New Members** (2nd Service: Kendra Shields)
- **Songs of Communion**
 - In Christ Alone
 - Sing to the King
- **Benediction**