

John 20:1-17

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.

1 The other Gospel writers tell us Mary Magdalene came with other women. It is not uncommon in Jewish writing to leave out the details that do not pertain to the author's point. More than enough details are mentioned in the passage to indicate that this was written by someone who had been to the site. The ladies had come on the third day as was customary for Jewish people to mourn the dead and add spices to what had already been placed with the body (Mark 16:1). The spices were to cover the smell of decomposition. They certainly were not there because they expected Jesus' resurrection.

The women probably did not know that the stone had been sealed by Rome or about the guards who had been there as that took place after the beginning of the Sabbath (Matthew 27:66). When they arrived, the stone sealing the entrance was already moved out of the way. An angel had moved it, not to let Jesus out, but to let the world in to see the tomb was empty (Matthew 28:2). The stone being left open would have caused them to fear grave robbery or desecration by the enemies of Jesus. Grave robbers were such a problem that in the next decade, the emperor Claudius would declare it to be a capital offense. The value of the spices, linen, and treasures buried with the dead was a great temptation for the poor.

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."

2 Mary apparently went on ahead of the other women as the passage describes her arriving while it is still dark, but the others are described as arriving at Sunrise (Matthew 28:1). Mary ran to tell the disciples before the other women saw an appearance of angels. After relaying the story of the empty tomb, she went back. The other women also went to the house where the disciples were hiding and told of the angel announcing the resurrection of Jesus. Though they all heard, only Peter and John acted on what they heard. The rest did not believe, choosing to reject the women's testimony (Luke 24:11).

³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.

3 We assume the unnamed disciple is John the Beloved. Whether they ran to confirm the fact that the tomb was empty or if they had hope that Jesus had risen, we do not know. Either way, they knew something was going on and they wanted to get to the bottom of it.

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.

4,5 Since John is writing this Gospel, he is the only one who would have known these details. John, the youngest, outran Peter, the oldest. It is not surprising, nor does it seem out of place that John would not go in, while bold Peter goes straight in. Bending down and sticking your head in that entrance puts you in a very vulnerable position if someone is inside the door. Impetuous Peter did not hesitate.

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.

6,7 John used a more intense word for the way Peter looked at the grave clothes. The language here for folded can mean “rolled”. The grave face cloth would be put over the head or on the head like a turban and then a strip of linen would tie it in place, also tying the mouth shut. The wording here may indicate the way the head cloth seemed to be right where it had been on the body of Jesus. The strips of linen that held the spices are mentioned, but the body shroud (if there was one - John does not mention it) may have been taken by Jesus for clothing. It was like a crime scene investigator looking at clues and trying to figure out what had happened. Also factor in the deep love they have for the one whose body is missing and the miraculous events and claims by Jesus.

⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

8 What John saw there convinced him that Jesus had risen from the dead. Lazarus had needed assistance to get out of the grave wrappings (John 11:44); Jesus went right through His. That seemingly impossible prediction of rising in three days had come to pass (Mark 10:34).

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.

9,10 The word for Scripture here is singular. It may mean all the Scriptures, but John was likely thinking of one particular verse. Here are a few that may have come to mind. ¹¹ *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* Isaiah 53:11 (ESV) ¹⁰ *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.* Psalm 16:10 (ESV) The Apostles will quote that verse as a proof text in Acts (Acts 2:31). Or my favorite, ² *After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.* Hosea 6:2 (ESV) It would be that evening, with the help of Jesus, that they would make the connection with Jesus' life and the many prophetic expressions in the Old Testament. If they would have already made those connections, it would have been easier for them to believe the words of Jesus that after three days He would rise from death. Our connection of the Word with our daily lives is what gives us faith to believe what Jesus is doing each day (Romans 10:17).

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.

11,12 Mary finally saw the angels that the other women had seen. It seems Mary has not yet heard what they told the other women (Matthew 28:5-7).

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."

13 We must really confuse angels at times. Her Lord is risen from the dead, made it possible for her to have eternal life, made her justified before God, and she is crying! "Woman, why are you weeping?" She probably did not realize all that, but where was her faith? The angels must feel that way about us at times too. We have all that Mary had and

more. We have the Word in our hands, two thousand years of church history, the presence of the Holy Spirit and we go about whining. I can just hear those angels, “Man, why are you whining? Where is your faith? You are chosen son or daughter of God. The righteousness of Christ has been credited to you. You have everlasting life!” From their heavenly perspective it must be hard to comprehend how we could be so caught up in our worldly perspectives (2 Kings 6:17).

14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

14 Through her tears and with her last recollection of Jesus as a lifeless mangled corpse, she assumed it was the only other man who would be there that early, the groundskeeper (Luke 24:16).

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."

15 Jesus asks the same question the angels asked, but also added the “whom”. There He stood! Sometimes we are crying our eyes out, asking for Jesus to show up and help us through our difficulty, and all the while He is right there speaking with us. Our tears and false conclusions blind us from the answer right in front of us (John 10:24).

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

16 How did He break through? He called her name. She knew how He said it. She knew the sound of His voice calling to her. Perhaps He had a special way of saying it to distinguish her from all the other Marys (Proverbs 8:17; John 10:4). It is the same for each of us (Isaiah 43:1). He knows you by name. He calls us by name.

Jesus has a way that breaks through our preoccupation with daily routines. For Nathaniel, He just needed to tell him He was there with him under the fig tree in his hour of prayer (John 1:48). Nathaniel instantly knew. For Moses it was His voice in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:7-9). For John it must have been some expression of love that was so meaningful to John that he would thereafter refer to himself as the one whom Jesus loved. For Peter, I think it was the phrase, “Do you love me” (John 21:16)? For the Apostle Paul and many of us, it is a recollection of our conversion. The Spirit of God has a phrase and a memory to break through to me, and He has a way to break through to each of you. If you do not know what it is already, ask Him to show you. Do not be afraid to get that intimate with Him. Go there often.

In the end of the letter to the church of Pergamum in Revelation, Jesus said that to the one who overcomes He will give a white stone with a new name written on it (Revelation 2:17). We will each have our own special name, like the way Jesus called to Mary Magdalene. I imagine it will have something to do with the way He tenderly speaks to us even now.

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.'"

17 The expression here has been a challenge to interpret because John did not add any interpretation or elaborate. My take on it is that Mary had just gone through the most

heart wrenching physical separation of her life. She finally found someone who loved and valued her. She finally found a reason to believe she was truly made in the image of God (Luke 8:2), and then that person who had brought so much healing to her soul was brutally murdered.

Suddenly there He was, alive again, and she did not want to ever let Him go. Jesus knew her heart and did not want to cause her more pain. She could not cling to His physical presence. He must ascend to the Father. The cycle of what He had come to do was almost complete. He would not allow her to be attached to His physical presence because it was time for her to come to know His spiritual presence (John 14:16-18).

Sometimes we would like to cling to things, even things through which we have come to know that we are loved and valued. It may be a church fellowship, certain brothers or sisters in Christ, or an old Bible that is falling to pieces. Jesus will wean us from things to help us know Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). When we cling to the physical, we are always vulnerable to having it removed, but the spiritual presence of Christ can never be taken from us. He would have us hold on to His Spirit and to truth by faith. Please understand that I am not talking about a feeling, or even that break through thing by which He gets your attention. He wants an intimacy with you that is more direct and personal than the symbols, signs, emotions, or feelings.

The wording of that command gives us some insights as to the change that resurrection had brought. Notice that Jesus does not say He is ascending to *our* Father and God. There is a difference in our relationship with God and His relationship. He is the only begotten Son (John 1:18). Our relationship with God is based on Jesus' relationship with God. But also notice that for the first time Jesus calls the disciples "brothers". Despite the great difference of Creator and creation, we have been adopted as sons of God and accepted as brothers of Jesus (Romans 8:14-15; Hebrews 2:11).

Questions:

Why did not the disciples believe Mary?

What made John believe?

What Scripture indicated the Messiah would rise from the dead?

How would the Word have helped them? Us?

Why do we confuse angels?

Discuss Jesus' special expressions for each of us.

Why could not Mary cling to Jesus? Relate.