

John 20:1 – 31

¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ ³ So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; ⁵ and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. ⁶ And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the face-cloth which had been on his head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰ So the disciples went away again to their own homes. ¹¹ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ And they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and 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 Hebrew, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means, Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, ‘Stop clinging to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.’’ ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord,’ and that he had said these things to her. ¹⁹ So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ ²⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them both his hands and his side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent me, I also send 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.’ ²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.’ ²⁶ After eight days his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see my hands; and reach here your hand and put it into my side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ²⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’ ³⁰ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Graveclothes*: Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the tomb in John 11, and Lazarus came out with graveclothes still wrapped around him.

Part One: Jesus' Resurrection – what is he able to do?

Part Two: Believing in Jesus is to be sent by Jesus

Questions

Part One: Jesus' Resurrection – what is he able to do?

1. What has happened to Jesus?
 - a. What impression do Jesus' grave clothes give? That he 'phased' out of them, leaving them neatly. His body wasn't stolen, because no one would refold the clothes like that. Also, how does that contrast with Lazarus' grave clothes in John 11? Lazarus was still wearing his grave clothes; death clung to him. Jesus completely escaped death and triumphed over it.
 - b. TEACH: What does it mean that Jesus was raised bodily?
 - i. James Cameron's claim that he found the dead body of Jesus – what would it mean if Jesus were simply dead?
 - ii. It means that our bodies matter to God. We are not and will not be disembodied souls. That means that sexuality matters and care for the poor matter. Unlike other belief systems.
 - c. Why doesn't Mary recognize Jesus? What has changed about him?
 - d. What does this mean about Jesus' physical humanity? His body?

Part Two: Believing in Jesus is to be sent by Jesus

2. Once again, let's get out there the questions we have about this passage.
3. (LG) Let's look at Mary, Peter, and John in v.1 – 10
 - a. There is a funny competition thing between Peter and John. Just an observation.
 - b. What does John believe in v.8? That Jesus rose, but he did so on evidence of the empty tomb, not on the evidence of Scripture. He's suggesting that it's possible to believe on the evidence of Scripture, and that this is preferable.
4. (LG) Let's understand Mary in v.11 – 18:
 - a. Where else in Scripture do we find angels in a garden?
 - i. Cherubim in Genesis 3:21 – 24. God was the fiery sword between the angels, guarding the way back to Eden.
 - ii. Cherubim on the lid of the mercy seat, on the ark of the covenant, in Exodus 25:17 – 22. God was the fiery column of light, guarding the way back to Eden, standing on the threshold between heaven and earth.
 - iii. Jesus is the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us, in John 1:14. So the glory of God now dwells in humanness, in Jesus' humanity.
 - iv. The ending of John's Gospel is like the beginning. Jesus is the glory of God and presence of God in humanness, who stepped out from between the two angels.
 - v. Notice that Jesus said, 'Do not touch me,' or 'hold on to me,' which echoes how the ark of the covenant was not to be physically touched (e.g. 2 Samuel 6). Jesus is gentler about it, but the same idea is present here.
 - b. Why might Mary see the two angels when Peter and John did not?
 - c. Why does Mary recognize Jesus when he calls her name? 'My sheep know my voice...?'
 - d. (trick question) Where else does Jesus say 'your Father' and 'your God'? Nowhere in John. This is the first time. Previously, he's only said 'my Father' or 'the Father' but never 'your Father.' Now, Jesus is extending a new level of intimacy with God as Father to others. It didn't exist before. Jesus is restoring us to God.
 - e. Note: At this period in time, women weren't considered to be valid witnesses in court. Why does Jesus leave it to Mary to carry the news? (We'll leave that to be answered later if people can't get it. It has to do with the undoing of the fall, and the fact that a woman is being faithful to the word vs. Eve being unfaithful. God undoes the sin of humanity and He does it in the order in which it happened.)
 - f. (pairs) How might Mary have felt about this assignment? How would you feel if you were sent by Jesus to be an unlikely witness?
5. (LG) Let's understand the male disciples in v.19 – 23
 - a. Notice that Jesus came and 'stood among them' (20:19). Previously, Judas stood among the soldiers, and Peter stood among the chief priest's household. Jesus comes and stands among them. That's a reversal. He must do it, for they are not capable of standing with him, on their own strength.

- i. There is no Greek word for where the disciples are. It's just the disciples were 'within.' The church is born within a womb, and sent out.
 - ii. John is talking about a household, about relationship to Jesus, not a particular street address in Jerusalem.
 - b. (tables) What's similar about this encounter to Jesus' encounter with Mary? What's different?
 - c. (LG) Similarities:
 - i. Jesus can phase through walls or clothes
 - ii. The disciples take a little while to recognize him.
 - iii. Jesus seems to look physically different
 - d. (LG) Differences:
 - i. The disciples are persuaded with physical evidence of his scars, whereas Mary only heard his voice. Note that John believed because of the empty tomb, with no voice and no scars. The burden of proof seems to be increasing. Jesus will comment on this unfavorably.
 - ii. Jesus' comments about peace, the Spirit, being sent, and forgiveness. Let's look at those in depth.
 - 1. Why 'peace' twice? Their anxiety about his dramatic appearance, or the threat from the Jewish leaders?
 - 2. Why breathe on them? New creation motif from Genesis 2:7, where God breathed into Adam and made him alive. Notice how creation and new creation motifs abound here?
 - a. Garden
 - b. Angels
 - c. Restored intimacy with God
 - d. Restored woman: Mary follows God's word as opposed to disobey it
 - e. Restored man: Jesus is God, breathing the Spirit into the disciples to make them alive.
 - f. Now, Jesus will send the disciples out from a garden to spread out over the whole world, to announce the new creation is available to people, that forgiveness is available to people. In creation, God's true humanity began in a garden in order to spread over the whole world. In the new creation, God's true humanity also begins in a garden in order to spread over the whole world.
 - 3. Why is it that the disciples have the power of forgiveness? Forgiveness is a community affair, as it means being welcomed into the community where the Holy Spirit resides in people. Recall how Jesus formed a new community from the cross between his disciple and his mother. There is a new humanity here. All must join it to be new.
 - 4. Jesus sends them out, as the Father has sent him. Read other John passages on Jesus being sent by the Father. What does this mean about us being sent by Jesus?
 - a. That Jesus goes with us. Being sent means being sent with Jesus, not being sent instead of Jesus.
 - b. That Jesus gives us power.
 - c. That Jesus gives us words.
 - d. That Jesus is the one who still stirs up people's faith.
 - e. That Jesus shapes our 'incarnation love' into other people's lives and cultures by his model of servanthood.
 - 5. What other missions do we tend to prioritize over Jesus' mission?
- 6. (LG) Now we understand how the mission is meant to unfold. Let's see how people are supposed to respond to it.
 - it. Thomas brings up the occasion for Jesus to comment on that.
 - a. What must it have been like for Thomas to sit with doubt for a week?
 - i. Note: Thomas is commendable, in that he doesn't say he believes when he really doesn't. How many people just cave under peer pressure???
 - ii. Thomas was willing to give his whole life, but doesn't want to be disappointed again.
 - b. How does Jesus relate to Thomas?
 - i. He accepts Thomas' conditions

- ii. He doesn't critique Thomas, but he affirms something else. Jesus doesn't rebuke Thomas for requesting physical evidence that can be seen. But he blesses others for believing based on 'not seeing.'
 - iii. Father John Behr says, 'Thomas wants to identify the Risen One as the Crucified One.' That's the main point Thomas stresses. Thomas is directing our attention back to the cross, where he was 'lifted up' as onto his throne. Remember that Thomas was ready to die with Jesus back in John 11. So Thomas may have been cementing his own understanding, and doing so for others.
 - c. How does Thomas respond?
 - i. 'My Lord and my God' – the highest affirmation of Jesus' identity found anywhere. Thomas gives himself wholeheartedly. No holding back. It's radical for a Jewish person to say that God is embodied in a human person. But that's exactly what he says.
 - d. How does Jesus comment on Thomas' response? What does it mean in v.29 to not believe based on 'seeing'?
 - i. Why would Jesus say this? To coach the second generation Christians who will never 'see' him physically. Aren't they disadvantaged? Let's see...
 - ii. Who does which?
 - iii. Notice that John believed based on 'seeing' the empty tomb, which is, seeing nothing! He believed based on hearing Jesus' words before.
 - iv. Mary believed based on hearing Jesus' voice.
 - v. The disciples do not believe based on hearing Mary's testimony. They believe based on seeing Jesus.
 - vi. Thomas believes based on seeing Jesus. He wanted to believe based on touching Jesus, but found that unnecessary.
 - vii. TEACH: Jesus normalizes belief without seeing. This is because the second generation Christian ran into the question of whether they could know Jesus as well as the original first generation Christians. But John's response to this is to say that Jesus' voice (his teaching and his voice in Scripture) is what matters. His physical presence didn't add any reliable information in itself. In fact, Jesus appeared to be just a man, or a brother, or a son, and perhaps a miracle worker. And people wanted to relate to him based on what they saw, without regard for what they heard him say. Jesus kept reminding people that it's what he said that matters. And of course, he wants to put his Spirit into us, not just hang around physically. *We have his word and his Spirit, so we second generation Christians can know him just as well as any first generation Christian did. That's amazing!!!*
 - viii. TEACH: This means that as the message of Jesus goes forth from a garden all over the world, and the restoration is underway, that people receive forgiveness by listening and receiving what they hear as truth. Notice how the word 'believe' occurs 6 times in v.24 – 31? It's all about believing what you hear, that Jesus is the Son of God.
 - ix. TEACH: It's NOT a question of 'Which character are you most like in this section?' As if Jesus will make *you* an exception and condescend to *your personal desire* for physical or visual evidence!! He's NOT going to show up for you like he did for Mary, the disciples, or Thomas. The point here is that there is ONLY ONE WAY to really approach Jesus and gain his Spirit: by believing what you hear – that he is the Son of God – regardless of what you see.
7. (pairs) How do you feel about being sent by Jesus?