

I've Seen the Lord

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¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² 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. 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 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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.'" ¹⁸ 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. (John 20:11-18)

1. Seeing Is Believing

There is an old saying in Asia, "seeing once is better than hearing 100 times." This is why so many people still travel around the world today. For many, traveling and seeing a place is as impactful as viewing images or reading about something hundreds of times.

Last Sunday, we celebrated Easter, the day of Jesus' resurrection. For many, believing in Jesus' resurrection is difficult. There are many people who ask "Was Jesus really resurrected from the dead?" When Jesus rose again, even his disciples had a hard time believing in his resurrection.

John 20:24 tells us that the disciples told Thomas that they had seen the risen Lord. Thomas wasn't with the other disciples at the time. Thomas says his fellow disciples, "***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 it***" (John 20:25).

2. The First Witness to the Resurrection of Jesus

Today's scripture tells us about the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew's gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb (Matthew 28:1). In Mark, the Bible tells us that there were three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome

(Mark 16:1). Luke's gospel tells us of "the women" without giving their names, likely two or more women (Luke 24:1). And John's gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone (John 20:1). The four gospels tell us that Mary Magdalene was there at the first encounter at the resurrection.

When Mary Magdalene arrived, she found herself shocked at the state of the tomb. The stone was removed from the entrance and the body of Jesus was gone. The tomb in Jesus' time would have been very different from what we use today for burials. The tomb would have been cut out rock with a doorway or entrance. The doorway would have been low so that a person would have to bend over to look in. The entrance would be closed by a large stone that would be rolled into place.

Mary Magdalene saw that the entrance was open and ran to Simon Peter and John. She told the disciples that someone took the body of Jesus from the tomb. The two disciples ran immediately and found that what Mary had said was true. The tomb was empty except for the burial cloth where Jesus' body was laid. The three of them didn't understand what had happened. The resurrection of Jesus wasn't a possibility in their minds. The two disciples went home and Mary was crying outside of the tomb.

3. Jesus Appears to Mary

A few minutes later, Mary bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels seated where Jesus' body had been. The angels ask her, "**woman, why are crying?**" She said, "**they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him**" (verse 13).

At that moment, Mary saw Jesus standing inside the tomb, but she didn't recognize Jesus because she does not expect him to be alive. Jesus says to her, "**Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?**" Mary, thinking this was the gardener, tells him, "**Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away**" (verse 15). Jesus calls her by name, "Mary." She instantly recognizes him. In turn, she responds, "Rabbouni!" (which means teacher in Aramaic). The "Rabbouni" was not merely "Teacher." It meant "my beloved teacher." The unthinkable thing happened. Mary's beloved teacher is resurrected. She must be full of joy and excitement. Mary can't believe that the risen Jesus is standing before her.

Why do you think Jesus appeared to Mary instead of Peter or John or the other disciples? It is probably because Jesus knew that Mary was more devastated at the death of Jesus and the state of the tomb than the disciples. Jesus says to Mary, "**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
(verse 17).

Mary wants to hold onto Jesus and is afraid of losing him again. But Jesus instead tells Mary to tell the disciples that Jesus is returning to God. When Mary goes to the disciples, she tells them, ***“I have seen the Lord”*** (verse 18).

4. Who Is Mary Magdalene?

There are many great men of God mentioned in the Bible but fewer women are mentioned throughout the Bible. One of the most prominent women mentioned is Mary Magdalene.

Mary was likely from a town called Magdala, a fishing town in the western shore of Galilee. The Four Gospels tell us that she was a Jewish woman who traveled with Jesus. She was a witness to the crucifixion, burial, and the resurrection. When Jesus’ disciples abandoned him, Mary Magdalene was one of the brave women who stayed with Jesus, even to the crucifixion.

Luke 8:2 tells us that Mary Magdalene had seven demons in her previously. “Seven” in Hebrew refers to the term “completeness.” The seven demons would mean that her condition was severe and that she was completely controlled by Satan.

Jesus set Mary Magdalene free from Satan’s control and she was full of thankfulness. Mary decided to become a faithful follower of Jesus. Along with the other women, Mary provided financial support for Jesus’ ministry. She was likely a relatively wealthy woman.

Mary Magdalene becomes a prominent figure in many of the early writings about the church. Her image would be portrayed in many different ways, sometimes as a former prostitute. More recently, Mary was portrayed as the secret wife of Jesus and the mother of her daughter. However, we know that none of these images can be found in the Bible.

What do we learn from the story of Jesus’ appearance to Mary? We note that Jesus was very intentional in appearing to Mary after resurrecting from the grave. Although Mary Magdalene was a supporter of Jesus’ ministry, she wasn’t a more important figure than the disciples. Jesus’ appearance after his resurrection reminds us that Jesus knows the condition of each person. Jesus was more concerned with encountering Mary than appearing to the disciples first after his resurrection.

5. True Evangelism

The term “evangelism” comes up regularly in a church. While preparing for this sermon, I found myself asking the question, what is true evangelism?

A lot of times, we focus on serving others as part of our evangelism. But serving alone doesn't present the message of the gospel. We may say at church, "to invite one person to church or a Christian concert." But this is often just the pre-step to sharing the gospel of Jesus.

Our passage today shows us the true reality of what it means to evangelize to others. Mary tells the disciples, "***I have seen the Lord***" and shares with them what Jesus said to her. Evangelism doesn't have to be a long explanation on the doctrine of the resurrection, but is simply sharing with others our experience that "we have seen the risen Lord."

6. Conclusion

1 Peter 3:15 says, "***But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.***" Peter encourages the early Christians to share their own experience of hope they have found in Jesus.

I am so grateful that evangelism and outreach have become important part of our church. Our study group learns about outreach and invites people to Sunday worship service. I pray that every time we gather, we are able to see the risen Lord in our midst and share with others that "I have seen the risen Lord" as a profession of our faith.

7. Application

Thirty years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Israel during my time as a seminary student. A professor at the Hebrew University served as our guide. The professor told the group, "don't try to find the risen Lord in the empty tomb, but find him in the hearts of the disciples." What he said still remains in my heart.

When I was visiting Israel in March this year, I was able to find the risen Christ in the heart of our guide FJ. He is a Palestinian Christian living in Jerusalem. He was born and has grown up in Jerusalem. While he lives in Jerusalem he has experienced discrimination, prejudice and oppression from the Jews. Due to such challenges and difficulties many Christians left Israel and moved to Jordan, Lebanon, and other neighboring countries. But he still lives in Jerusalem helping tourists from other countries. He still trusts in the Lord and patiently waits for the return of Jesus.

What is the passion that drives us every day? It is the experience of meeting the risen Christ. When we've seen the risen Lord, we can share with others that Jesus lived, died, rose from the dead, and will come again, so that others may meet the same Jesus that has given us an everlasting hope and

joy. Have you seen the Lord? I hope we can see the Christ in each other's heart. Amen.