I Have Seen the Lord

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Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene
came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed 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** Then Peter and the
other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. **4** The two were running
together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He
bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not
go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He
saw the linen wrappings lying there, **7** and the cloth that had been on Jesus’
head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.
8 Then the other disciple, who 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 returned to their homes. 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 20:1-18)

1. The Most Important Message of Christianity

I have four passages from the Bible today. Which one do you think is the most important message for Christians?

1. “***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth***.” (Genesis 1:1)

2. "***God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life***." (John 3:16)
3. "***He is not here. He has risen***." (Matthew 28:6)
4. "***I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more***." (Revelation 21:1)

All these passages are important. Some may think that John 3:16 is the most important passage. However, the disciples might tell us that another one may be the most important. When we read through the Acts of the Apostles, we see that wherever the disciples went, the most important thing they talked about was the good news of the risen Christ. As Matthew 28:6 says, "***He is not here. He has risen***."

Listen to what Peter preached in his first sermon, "***But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power"*** (Acts 2:24). Peter preaches the news of Jesus' resurrection with passion and conviction. If Jesus did not rise again, there would be no Christianity and church today.

2. Mary Magdalene's Witness

The narratives of the resurrection of Jesus are found in four gospels. John's gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene is the first witness to Jesus' resurrection. Who was Mary Magdalene? Luke 8:2 says that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her. Although she was not one of 12 disciples, she was one of Jesus' constant followers. Mary Magdalene not only traveled with Jesus, but also contributed to the needs of Jesus and his disciples. Mary Magdalene was also present at Jesus' crucifixion.

After Jesus was crucified early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb to anoint Jesus' body. Mary discovered that the stone in front of Jesus' tomb had been removed. Mary was concerned and she thought the body of Jesus was missing. Mary ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple (probably John, the author of the gospel). She told them that someone had taken the body of Jesus out of the tomb.

Peter and the other disciple ran toward the tomb and discovered that Jesus' tomb was empty. The two disciples were not sure of what happened to Jesus. No one was expecting the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples returned to their homes in puzzlement.

Mary Magdalene was weeping outside the tomb. When she looked into the tomb, she saw two angels inside the tomb, who said, "***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***" (verse 13).

While talking with the angels, Mary became aware of the presence of another person. She turned to see who it was. It was Jesus. Mary did not recognize Jesus. She thought he might be the gardener. When Jesus called her name, “Mary,” she called him, “Rabonni,” which means teacher. After she met Jesus, Mary was excited and went to tell the disciples, saying “***I have seen the Lord***.” Mary Magdalene became the first witness of the resurrection of Jesus.

3. Have You Seen the Lord?

Among all the messages in the Bible, the resurrection of Jesus was the most important message for the early Christians. Wherever the disciples preached, they proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. In Acts 3:15, Peter says, “***You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this***.” Peter emphasized that although the people had killed Jesus, God had brought Jesus back to life. Peter pointed out God’s triumph and power over death in Jesus’ resurrection.

Who can be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus? Those who experience Jesus’ appearance can be a witness to his resurrection. Mary Magdalene says to the disciples, “***I have seen the Lord***.” This morning, the question I have for you and me is, “***Have we seen the Lord***?” It could be easy to see Jesus if we lived in the time and place of Christ. But can we or how do we see the risen Lord today?

Acts 9:4 says, Saul (who was called Paul later) fell to the ground on his way to Damascus and heard a voice saying to him, “***Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me***? Saul asks, “***Who are you, Lord***?” “***I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting***,” Jesus replied. The risen Christ appeared to Saul. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Saul sent many followers of Jesus to prison. But after his personal encounter with Jesus, Paul surrendered his life to Christ and became the most passionate witness to the resurrection of Jesus in the world.

4. Do You Love Me?

You might ask me the same question, “Have you seen the Lord?” I have not encountered the risen Jesus like Mary Magdalene or Saul. However, I have an undeniable experience when the risen Lord appeared to me. I’ve shared previously, but I remember in my early 20s, the risen Christ asked me, “do you love me more than these?” This was the same question that Jesus asked Peter after his resurrection at the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus asked me many times. I eventually surrendered my life and decided to follow Jesus’ plans for my life.

5. Conclusion

We aren't together in the church sanctuary this morning; however, we are gathered here today on Zoom to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We remember that Mary Magdalene and Saul did not ask Jesus to appear to them after his resurrection. The disciples had no expectation that Jesus would rise for the dead. Yet, Jesus appeared to them unexpectedly.

Why do you think Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, his disciples, Saul, and others? Jesus' goal wasn't to create a new religion or promote himself. Instead, Jesus saw that Mary Magdalene and Jesus' disciples were in despair. Jesus knew how much they wanted to see Jesus again and they needed to be reminded of the hope for a reunion and eternal life.

6. Application

As of this morning, there are 1,800,000 global cases and 110,000 deaths due to the coronavirus. In the U.S., we have more than 530,000 cases and 20,000 people have passed away. The good news of the resurrection of Jesus is most needed in our country today. Although we all die, the resurrection of Jesus tells us that our physical death is not final. There will be a life and a resurrection after death for those who believe in Christ Jesus.

There are many who do believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not easy to believe. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "***If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died***" (verses 17-21).

Since the beginning of the early church, many doubted the resurrection of Jesus. Many Greeks did not believe that people could be resurrected after death. The church at Corinth was in the middle of Greek culture and many doubted the resurrection of the dead. However, Paul says that the resurrection of Christ is what allows believers to have faith in their own resurrection.

Many people would think that no one can win death. However, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, "***Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"… But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ***" (verse 55).

Paul emphasizes that Christ defeated death so that we do not need to be in dread or fear of death. Paul says that the resurrection of Jesus gives us life, hope, and peace beyond death. Where can we find such life, hope and peace in this world? Those who have seen the Lord can have victorious life, unshakable hope and perfect peace. Have we seen the Lord? Amen.