

Our Father
John 20:17

We are in this passage of such deep grief and overpowering joy. Mary Magdalene has come back to the empty tomb. She converses with a couple of angels, but seems unaware they are angels in her grief. Then she converses with another that she believes is the gardener, but Jesus reveals himself to her. Look at verse 16, **“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).”** We see all that sorrow and grief is immediately gone and replaced by such joy and bliss and astonishment and relief. Amazing isn’t it! She sees her Lord. And there is one day that our faith in Christ will be turned to sight, and all the trials and travails and sorrow and tears of this life will be no more. We will meet the Lord.

But we still have this life to live. Mary still has this life to live. So think of the whole scene and think of what you would want to do if you were Mary. You would want to stay and never leave that place. You would want to never depart out of the physical presence of Jesus. I have lost him once. I will never lose him again. It is so glorious. It is so comforting and securing to be in his presence. It is almost like when the three disciples were on the mount of transfiguration and they see the glory of Christ shining through, and see Elijah and Moses, Peter wants to build three shrines because they do not want to leave. They want to stay. And there is something about the presence of the Lord that attracts us. We want to be there. We do not want that moment to end. Have you ever studied or been in prayer and God seems so close? It was called thin places, the distance between heaven and earth. God is always present with us, but the distractions are gone, we are so at one with the Lord. We don’t want it to end!

And there are a couple of things I want us to see in this text. The first is that God doesn’t want us to stay in those thin places, but he wants us to be about the family business. We will see that tonight. Jesus dispatches Mary to leave and go tell the disciples he is risen. And that is the amazing aspect of life. God has given us a mission to not only live and trust and follow him, but also to speak for him. We are sent to make and mature disciples for the glory of God. God has given us purpose. I think in one sense we realize this, but in another sense we do not. I talked to one gentleman who said the real important things of life is just to love your family and children. And I think for most that is what they think after tragedy or illness hit. What is important is just these family relationships. And they are important. But what is most important whether before our family or before others is that we represent and speak of Jesus Christ. We truly have a mission. God saves us and brings us into his family to be about the family business. And that business is to speak about him.

And the second thing that I hope we will see in the text is because of the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Jesus has entered into a different relationship with us. We long to be with him, in his physical presence, but the glorious truth is because he is ascended he has entered a relationship with us that is closer than any earthly relationship that any of the disciples or any other could ever have with Christ. I mean it should just blow our minds to realize the truth of Colossians 1:27, **“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** Christ is in us

through the Holy Spirit. His presence is with us wherever we go. What a glorious truth to our weary souls. So often we talk about feeling so distant from Christ. It could be because of struggles with sin, feeling parched spiritually, or just the trials of life that seem to pile on one another. But here is the glorious and assuring truth, the one who promised to never leave us or forsake us is ever with us. He cannot be any closer than he is right now. Take great comfort that there is never a place where your Jesus is not with you. All places are thin places! He is closer than any of the disciples ever experienced during his earthly ministry.

So the challenges then are a couple. One is do we realize that we have been called by our God into this forever relationship where his mission and priorities are to become ours, they are to be central? And do we realize in the midst of this mission he truly goes with us? God is so good! May we about our Father's business realizing that we are never alone in this endeavour and calling in our lives.

1. We need to see the presence of Jesus V. 17.

We certainly cannot imagine the astonishment and the glory of this moment. Here incomprehensible grief meets the greatest and so substantial comfort. There is always so much hope in our trust in Christ. We realize no matter how difficult this life, after the night the dawn will come. We do have a Deliverer who will wipe away every tear, and death and sorrow will be no more! But again, right here right now, in this life we have a mission. We are thankful for those sweet times of learning and fellowship and communion with our Lord, but it should give way to seeking to speak and make much of him to others. We come with the message that he has given us by Christ.

Now, D.A. Carson says in his commentary on the Gospel of John that this is among a handful of verses in the New Testament that are very difficult to interpret. And what he means by that is that it is very difficult to know its meaning. There are various interpretations where people have tried to read in some sort of meaning but it just has not been satisfactory. So think through what is being communicated here, **“Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.’**” What does he mean when he says to Mary, “do not cling to me,” or literally “do not touch me?” And then he says “I have not yet ascended to the Father.” This has puzzled many. And when you study through a book and passage you have to come to some conclusions. Liberal scholars many times reject the literal resurrection of Jesus. He was just a spirit of phantom and this proves it because there is nothing to hang onto. Or, Mary might have even been hallucinating. But that certainly goes against what we read in a few verses where Thomas actually touched the body of our Lord.

Some think that he has to somehow present himself before his Father above. That there is some kind of presentation and ascension of the Son before the Father, in between this appearance and the next to his disciples and then after Thomas touching his wounds. But what would be the nature of this intermediate ascension? What would be the reason or purpose? Is there something left undone in salvation? Is there some act that Jesus still has to fulfill? When Jesus cried it is finish, when the curtain was torn in two, was something still undone? And here is the incredible aspect that if this event was necessary for our salvation, if there was something still that needed to be done, that Scripture is quite silent on it. And if he did go into heaven it seems that it would be

more likely after being in that heavenly and holy realm that his body shouldn't be touched rather than before.

I think there are a couple of things going on here. One is that the relationship has really changed. Jesus is the resurrected Christ. Over in the gospel of Matthew it seems that Mary might have already grasped his feet. It is not so much that she cannot touch him because he has to somehow present himself to the Father, but what he is saying is that this earthy relationship that she so treasured and enjoyed has changed. He will not be here physically forever. There is an urgency for her to go tell the disciples. Also by saying I haven't gone he is saying nor am I going right away. There is a time where I will ascend but it is not now. Therefore I give you this commission to go tell the brothers, that I am here. Remember, they saw the empty tomb but not the body of Jesus. He has not ascended yet into heaven. He is still with them.

This makes what comes next with the invitation of Thomas to come touch more easier to understand. She thinks this is just a continuation of his earthly life but it is anything but. He is the risen and glorified Lord forevermore. He is given an existence that does not have the constraints that it used to, and he is able to live in this new realm of being at the right hand of the Father forevermore. Mary believes he is alive, but no doubt she thinks he might disappear or go away. She wants to cling to him. Thomas is invited to touch because he does not believe. He is invited to see and touch Jesus to confirm Jesus is alive forevermore! So the message that she gives to the disciples that he has not yet ascended means that as long as he has not ascended they can expect to see him. And that is what happens. He appears to them a number of times. He validated he is risen and that sin has forevermore been dealt with. "I am ascending" means there is a process that is taking place that will culminate as we see in Acts 1, but it has not happened yet.

And here is the glory of the coming ascension, these believers along with future believers would never again lose the presence of Jesus in their lives. He would always be with them. Our Saviour, Lord, Friend is alive, and living and dwelling with us. We live on the other side of the ascension. Jesus has gone to heaven. And therefore we have this higher and more glorious relationship with him. One of my favourite verses is Galatians 2:20, it is laden with truth and also direction on how we live in light of that truth, **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** My life, your life, is totally different. The old life is gone, not only have we been made anew, but Christ dwells in us. And if he dwells in us then we live a new relationship with him, and that is for him and his glory.

And let me give a couple of applications to this truth. Jesus after his resurrection would suddenly appear to them without notice. He would be there, after his resurrection, and after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus doesn't appear to us here and there, but is constantly with us. Take great comfort in that fact. Not only are you never alone in this battle called life, but no matter what location or adversity you will face this week your Jesus will be with you. He will give you the necessary grace to go through whatever he has called you to go through. Trouble in our marriage he is there. Trouble with your children he is there. Trouble fighting sin or selfishness he is there. He is in the closet of relationships. And he is a grace giving and present Saviour.

Encourage your heart with whatever you are going through, you are not alone. The One person you want to be with you is forever with you.

The other thing to see about his ascension and his presence with us is life can be so weary. I talked to a person as I was studying this passage, and he marvelled at all the complications and trials and even failures in his life, but the thing that he marvelled about is that he was talking to me after a church service. He was still following the Lord. He was still singing and praising him even with all the difficulties and ups and downs that we call life. And he wondered why? And the only answer was there was someone causing him to persevere. He was weak and knew it, but someone else would not let him go. Listen to what Jesus said earlier in John 10:28-29, **“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”** Double assurance. The emphasis is so encouraging with Jesus’ ascension. We often think it is loss not to have the earthly presence of Jesus. So think, the reason why you are here today is because of his work, because of his presence in your life, and he is in fact in you. You are weak but he is so strong and loving. Glory in the One who ascended and is now forever with you. Take confidence no matter what you are facing this week that greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world!

2. We need to see our calling. V. 17.

Our calling is tied to our identity. Once you see who you are in Christ, and the closeness and intimacy of this relationship with our God, then you cannot help but follow him and seek to make much of him. Part of our problem is that we seek or find our identity in so many other things. We think fulfilment and life comes through the amount of sex or the amount of things I am able to acquire in life. We can even find our identity in good things. We might find our primary identity in being parent or being a spouse. But they were never meant to be your primary relationship or your Messiah. And if they are, you end up loving them less, because it really is about you. You need them, therefore you might say things you ought not say — more driven by fear or anger than love. You might not say things because you fear the loss of where you find life and looking for life. But finding our true identity in Christ causes us to truly love and sacrifice and represent Christ before others. It causes us to really love them and forfeit often the comfort that I might enjoy by giving my time to others, or having those difficult conversations because I truly love Christ and therefore love them and want the best for them.

So think of what Jesus says here to Mary as far as the message she is to give, because it is so glorious, **“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.’”** Now think of the message here. I am ascending but I have not. But where will he go when he does ascend? And the answer is great — **“to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”** Think of who we were and who we are now. Listen to Ephesians 2:3, **“among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”**

Who were we by nature? Children of wrath. Even Jesus said of the religious leaders a little earlier in this gospel that they were of their father the Devil. But now we call our God — our Father! It is incredible the change in relationship. Jesus now is our elder brother through the new birth we are born again, he is our Lord. We have a new nature. We are the children of God. And through the sacrifice of Christ we are adopted right into the family of God. We are his children forevermore. Listen to Romans 8:14-15, **“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”** We are able to cry “Abba Father,” because of the finished work of Christ in our lives and because God has created life and relationship in us.

Jesus even calls for the first time the disciples his brothers. Before this he was their master or their friend, but right here — they are brothers. God is their father. This again is all based on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We have been brought into the closest of relationships with God and with one another.

And let me just give a couple of implications of this new standing and identity that we are in. We have access right into the throne room of grace. We do not need any intermediary because we are his children, and as his children we can come into his presence of our Father. He delights and welcomes me right into his presence. And the second thing is as my Father I always not only have his presence but my identity, my forever status and position are forever secure. As Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, **“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** There is nothing in all of creation that can separate me from the love of my Father.

Now some will say they can't trust God because they had such an unloving father. They know their father was abusive or just absent or whatever. And the greatest suffering in your life has the greatest power. An abusive, dismissive or uninvolved dad has led many women to never trust men of any kind. I just will not be hurt again! For many men, it is they have a hard time at letting people come close, letting them in. This is what happens when I do. Here is the principle — the greatest suffering has the greatest power in our lives. But think of the suffering of Christ. Did anyone suffer greater than he? His greatest suffering causes the greatest power in our lives. His suffering gives us the Father we all long for. I think we can all say that our fathers were not all that they should be. And just saying all that means we know what they should be or should have been. This is the good news of God our Father. Everything we know a father should be and everything we need in a father is found in our great God. No one ever cared for me like Jesus and also, no one ever cared for me like my Father God. Even the trials and struggles in my life are put there that I might see and know him, and might mature in the likeness of Christ. My Father will only bring what is necessary and ultimately beneficial in my life. Based on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, God is our God. God is our Father!

But also we see in this passage that Jesus gives her a commission, something that she needs to do, and that is not stay where he is but to go and tell others — the

disciples about the resurrection of Christ and that he is here. She is the first to announce that Jesus has risen and she had seen the Lord. We are told over in Luke that the disciples received this report with more suspicion than anything.

But here is what we are called into. Since we are members of God's household, since God is our Father and Jesus our elder brother, we are called into the family business. And the family business is to live a life of holiness or consecration to him. We are to follow Christ and live those lives that reflect his glory. And we are also to announce Jesus and the way of forgiveness. We are to announce it to all those who are outside of the family, and tell them there is a way to be in the family. There really is forgiveness of sins. Jesus really did come and live that perfect life and die that substitutionary death so that we might have life. All you have to do is realize your need and simply trust that he is enough for a sinner like you. This is our calling and life, and our honour to be called to speak and make much of him.

And when you realize your identity in Christ, living out who we are in Christ becomes almost natural even though it is supernatural. We are brothers of Jesus Christ. We are children of the most high God. And all of God's people would say yes and amen, but are we living out that identity? Are we truly realizing that our jobs, earthly families, friends or whatever are given to us to live out our identity? One of the great frustrations of life is we forget who we are. We forget what Christ has done. We forget our calling. And when we try to find our identity in something else rather than God and what Jesus Christ has done for sinners like us our lives go terribly wrong. Are you forgetting who you are in Jesus Christ? Are you forgetting your calling as part of the family? There is nothing that should thrill our hearts more than who we are in Christ. There is nothing that should direct our lives more than who we are in Christ. My plea to all of us is to think of who you are in Christ. The more we see who we are in Christ the more it will change our lives.