

Peace Be With You!
John 20:18-19

One of the hardest things for people to believe today is just about anything. We have what seems to be a contradiction in terms, alternative truth, which is labeled false news — a term that was coined not many years ago to describe the false narrative that is said by a certain political side. The only problem is both sides accuse the other of false news. Articles are often produced online by people that are completely fabricated in order for you to believe something about someone. And every time you read an article you do not know if it true. To add to that we have companies advertising certain products online, but when you order them, such as Temu, when they arrive they are not anything like you thought you ordered. I ordered a coat men's large, and it was more like a boys small, and not near the quality that it looked like in the advertisement.

Add to that the proliferation of deep fakes, which is a term where they can make videos now of famous personalities saying or doing something that they never said or did. You can watch it with your own eyes, but that person wasn't even there or never said those words. Photos can be doctored— added to or deleted at will. And here it is — you just do not know what to believe anymore. We live in a day and age where there is too much information coming at us, but also there is too much that cannot be trusted that it is hard to discern what is true and what is false, so we end up questioning everything. Do you know what I am talking about? Did he really say that? Did a earthquake in such and such a place really happen? Did they really pass that law?

And the reason why I say all of that is what we just read in verse 18, **“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’—and that he had said these things to her.”** Notice what Mary says, “I have seen the Lord.” Notice It is a witness of something that seems almost unbelievable and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But here is the thing that has been said multiple times that the resurrection of Jesus is the most well-attested event and most verifiable in all human history. In a day and age where we question everything, we have the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Think of it. The first eyewitnesses were women that if you were trying to fabricate a story and have it believable you would not have women, because they were looked on in that society as not credible witnesses. But who comes to the disciples even before Jesus? Mary Magdalene. We see that he appeared multiple times to multiple individuals, and the glory and certainty of these witnesses who were not looking for a resurrection is believable. You have the disciples themselves that were all martyred. People do not go through all that they went through in order to protect a lie. Peter was said to have been crucified upside down. The author of this gospel was boiled in oil, and then banished to the isle of Patmos. And then we have the gospels themselves. They differ in parts as the various witnesses emphasize different aspects. It breathes of authenticity. And this really is the greatest witness and that is these documents are inspired or God-breathed productions. They witness with our spirits that these things are so. We walk away and all we can do is praise our great God with this fact — He is risen.

As Mary announces that message, we also by faith to announce that very message. And why? Because of the certainty of it. This is the incredible assurance of

Christianity. We live in a day and age where it is hard to trust anything and anyone yet we have the absolute assurance of Jesus Christ, not only crucified, but raised from the dead. People who deny it after the evidence is brought forth, deny not because it didn't happen but they just do not want to believe.

I want us to look at this first appearance to the disciples. He has already appeared to some. He appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but this is the first in the gospel of John. And we learn so much about our Lord, and so much about our hope we have in him. I want us to behold the wonder of our forever living Jesus.

1. We see Jesus coming. V.19a

One of the things I am always amazed at is the Lord is a seeking Lord, who finds his own. We often talk about salvation that we sought and found the Lord, but it is really the other way around. Our Lord sought us, and effectively found us and called us. We love him for only one reason — because he first loved us. And nothing engenders us to loving and seeking the Lord than seeing that he is the one who is not only for us but the one who seeks us and truly wants and desires to own our hearts. He comes to us through his Word and meets us in the most dire times in our lives.

And you can see that in this passage. Mary brings the message. They are told that the Lord has not ascended and that he is here somewhere, but there is no seeking of him. It is still the first day of the week, and here they are huddled in the room petrified by what might be next. Crucifixion was always an awful and certain death. No one comes back from that. No one in all human history except one.

So look at what the text says here, **“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews.”** Now here it is and it is still that first resurrection Sunday, but now the day has been spent with lots of tension, and more questions coming as far as Jesus, where he is and what has happened. Could he be risen? The fear of the disciples takes over with the uncertainty. The doors are locked for the fear of the Jews. They know something of the extent of the religious leaders hatred for Jesus. They know they might be arrested and sentenced to a slow and painful death like his. And here the doors are locked. No doubt when they heard footsteps their fear increased because this could be armed soldiers come to arrest them. No doubt they talked with one another about the events of the day — the empty tomb, and even the appearances of Jesus up to this point. Could these be believed? Was he really alive?

It is amazing that the way we see the disciples locked here in a room for fear of the Jews is still the way many believers meet together. But they meet by faith. They are secretly meeting together. They live in countries where persecution and martyrdom are common occurrences. They do not know if the doors of their meeting place are going to be barged open and what will happen to them. And this is something to behold here, because often we are hard on the disciples. But here they are and they are still together. They are still meeting together. Although hope really faint at times they are still honouring their Lord, Saviour, and friend. They still do not see the significant of all that is going on, but they are together.

And don't we often say that during times of uncertainty, fear, struggles and what seems to be overwhelming anxiety in our lives that the best place to be is around our

brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ? We come out, and through the corporate meeting we not only have the word of God preached to us, but we have the comfort of other weary travellers. We have the encouragement of others that helps and emboldens us. The disciples of the Lord are together, meeting together in the midst of such fear and anxiety, and that is a great example for all of us as we live in the uncertainty of the times and seasons, because it directs our hearts that there is One who is in control.

So look at what happens next, “**Jesus came and stood among them.**” Wow! What an amazing statement. Maybe one of the fears is that if Jesus rises he would be done with them, after all they had deserted him. And it is one of the great truths of Christianity that nothing in all the cosmos, even our own foolish and self-centred hearts will separate us from his love and presence in our lives. And I love this because in times of greatest failure in the disciples what do we read — “Jesus came.” Again, you almost think that they might be looking for him, but Jesus came. He’s looking for them. He finds us. He finds his own because really he has never left us. It is amazing at certain times how discouraged we can be or how overwhelmed with failure we can be. Yet Jesus comes. He shows himself through his Word and through his people to be all that we need. The reason why we are here tonight is because of Jesus coming time and time again. He really will not leave or ever forsake us!

And also notice that Jesus stood before them. The doors are locked so that no one can get in. So how does he get in? And the answer is — he is Jesus. This is the same one who passed through the grave clothes. They were left as if the body passed right through them. And the stone at the tomb would have been no problem for Jesus to pass through. The reason why it is rolled away is not to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in to see that it is empty. Yet, he is not ghost. We will see that he still has his wounds and he still can be touched and handled. He still can and does eat. This is not a new body that is given to Jesus but a transformed humanity, a body that goes from corruption to incorruption, from shame to glorified existence. And therefore has capacities that it never had before. It does not have the limitations of our human existence, but it is the same body. It still has the visible signs of his crucifixion. Those signs will be forevermore a constant reminder of the One who came and suffered and gave his life that we might have life, and has conquered the penalty because he is alive forevermore.

And as we think through these resurrection appearances of Jesus and how he appeared and function we realize that this is our great hope. There is a day of resurrection, of change coming to our humanity, to our bodies. Our lowly bodies will be changed to be like his. John says over in 1 John 3:2, “**Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.**” It would have been incredible to hear these truths taught by Jesus as he taught about the kingdom and the time to come. He appeared and taught for forty days before ascending to the Father. And what a thrill to realize this is the life that lay ahead. And I wonder if we are looking over the horizon waiting and yearning for that day to arrive? It is easy to tell if we are truly wanting and desiring that day, John continues and says in 1 John 3:3, “**And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.**” We want to live for Christ. We want a small taste of that life to come where our hearts are so taken

up with Christ, and our minds are not taken up with the world or sin, but Christ. And here is the question — is your hope and love for Christ so impacted the way you live? Does it have a purifying effect? Are you finding holiness desirable? It would be a strange thing to prize some kind of sin in this life and then say I hope Christ comes back, because it would mean loss of what you really prize. But if our prize is Jesus and life with him, then we want to enjoy that life and fellowship with him now. **“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

And here is the certainty of that life to come. Jesus appeared! He came to those who know him best. He appeared over and over. Even the religious leaders could not produce a body because there was none to produce. They cannot deny he is dead because he kept on showing up for forty days! In a day and age we have so much certainty as believers in Christ. Encourage your heart with this elemental but oh so glorious truth on Christianity — Jesus is alive!

2. We see Jesus speaking. V.19b.

One of the great truths is not only is Jesus is alive but our Jesus is for us and not against us. Our God is for us and not against us. We often forget the truth of Romans 8:31-34, **“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (How do we know God is for us?) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? (how do we know that in the end we will not be condemned?) Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”** Incredible, isn’t it? We mess up over and over again. We say and do things we ought not to. Often our spirit is willing but the flesh is so weak. Have you ever blown it? And we wonder if God is finally and forever done with us. Have you ever thought that? Sin bothers the believer so much more. An unsaved person can blow up in anger, or give way to lust, or lie or cheat and never feel bad. But we do. We see what our sin deserves. And it is so easy to think that God is through with us, because we would be through with people like us! We would want nothing to do who repeatedly sin against us.

And think of this whole scene and how startling it would have been. Luke records this response in Luke 24:37, **“But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.”** It is some sort of ghost. It is some sort of apparition, whatever, they had to have thought the Lord had come back to punish or judge them or whatever. Of all the people that had the most revelation given to them in human history up until that time it was the disciples, but all abandoned him. They had failed him. I mean what do we do when people fail us and fail us miserably — we give them a piece of our mind or cast them aside. Think of the condemning speech that children many times hear — how much they failed or disappointed us. And I would think this is what they expected from our Lord. “You good for nothings!” “You proud and arrogant and selfish derelicts” “Don’t you know all that I went through for you, and this is how you repay me?!” I mean, isn’t that the way we speak to others when they fail us? They were fearful of the Jews but you can imagine the greater fear that comes when you

stand in the presence of an all holy God and think that he is against you and not for you. And there is no defence! I am guilty, worthy of punishment.

But then our Saviour speaks. Often people often speak of the last seven sayings of Jesus. And what they mean by that is the seven last statements on the cross. But they really were not the last words said by Jesus, because he had so much more to say, and we see some of those words in the last couple of chapters of this gospel that are so significant and so full of hope. And you can see the enormity of hope right here, because instead of lambasting them, they hear words that they no doubt didn't expect but that were so comforting and so assuring and so hopeful. He says, **"Peace be with you."** Now think through all the events that just happened and how we got to this place. Here Jesus says - "Peace be with you" in the evening of the first Easter or on Resurrection evening because on Good Friday he said, **"It is finished!"** He had exhausted and drank the cup of the wrath of God fully and finally and now we have peace with God. It is a peace that is ours forevermore. Listen to Romans 5:1, **"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Don't you love that? We have been justified through the finished work of Christ, Jesus is raised which indicates the debt has been paid forevermore, and the result is that we have the peace of Christ — we have forever peace with God. He will never be against us but will always be for us.

And the peace with God leads to the peace of God, which is experiential and based on the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said earlier in John 14:27, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."** It is a peace that is given by Christ that lives inside of us. We know whatever comes into our lives our God is for us. He has his good purposes for us, and he will be glorified. We can rest in his sovereign love for us. Often people wonder how Christians can be so calm or even joyful in the midst of trials and hardship. It is not that they are unfeeling or do not hurt, but there is a glory and peace in them that the world cannot understand because it is not the peace of the world but the peace of Christ. All our cares are cast on him. We know that we are accepted in the beloved forevermore because of what Jesus has done. Think of Paul instructions to us in Philippians 4:6-7, and the outcome of those instructions, **"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** The peace of God! The world cannot understand but we can! Look at my God. Look at what Jesus has done! My God is forever for me!

We have the assurance even through our imperfect and sinful lives that we, like the disciples will be with him. Peace be with you! Listen to what A.W. Pink writes about this, **"'Peace' is the first word He pronounced in the ears of His disciples now that He is risen from the dead. So will it be when we meet Him face to face—we, with all our miserable failures, both individual and corporate; we with all our sins of omission and commission; we, with all our bitter controversies, and deplorable divisions. Not 'Shame! shame!' but 'Peace! peace!' will be His greeting. How do we know this? Because He is 'The same yesterday and to-day and forever.' Almost His last words to the disciples on the 'yesterday' were 'these things have**

I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace"(John 16:33); so here His first word to them in the "to-day" was peace; and this is the pledge that "Peace" will be His word to us at the beginning of the great "forever.""

This kind of response from our Lord cannot but excite our hearts and draw us to him. Think about how often we sin and just blow it. Think how often we struggle. We know what is right, but the ability and desire to still do sin is still in us. Here is where we are not like the Lord. We would have given up on people like us a long time ago. But what does our Lord do? He seeks his own. He comes to them with the fullness of who he is. He joyfully and delightfully claims us as his own. He is excited as the Bridegroom to welcome us into his forever presence. Peace is a message of welcome. You are mine. There is nothing that creates a barrier between us, but the deepest and abiding relationship. Again, the reason you are here today is not because of your tenacity but because of his great grace and love in your life and heart. It is because he has in his love been relentlessly seeking and pursuing and finding you. But not only that he comes with the most comforting of messages. Feel the weight and glory of that message — Peace. Jesus really has done it all. He really has brought forever peace.

Again, that message cannot do anything else to the true people of God than bring not only comfort but a desire to follow and love and rejoice in our Jesus. He truly is alive. He truly is our Saviour. He truly lives for us today. He truly is our peace!