

Rabboni!
John 20:11-18 (14-16)

We have been looking at chapter 20 for a few weeks and have seen signs of the resurrected Christ. Today we come to the fulfilment and we have the first resurrection appearance recorded in Scripture and it is Mary. And we saw that after she comes early in the morning with the other women, and finds the stone rolled away from the tomb, she runs to find Peter and John, who run to the tomb. They see the order of the grave clothes and no doubt faith is kindled in them. They go home, and we see verse 11 picks up the narrative with Mary Magdalene comes back to the tomb.

We see her overwhelming grief in this passage. She has been crying for three days and three nights, and cannot seem to get her composure. She peers into the tomb and there are two angels that are dressed in white, but she doesn't even notice or realize that these are angels. And even their position of sitting speaks of something accomplished. They ask, why are you weeping? And I think angels must be puzzled, never knowing sin, or our struggles with unbelief and sin in our lives. It is so evident that he is risen. And this is such a searching question, but all that Mary can concentrate on is the external, and she gives herself a faulty message. They have taken my Lord and I do not know where he is. Her whole goal is to find the dead body of Jesus and honour him in death. It is not much of a hope, but a hope that is so limited that it would soon evaporate. Just like many of the things that we hope for in this life which truly can never satisfy. Our hopes are too limited and often too earthly.

And there are a couple of things that I want us to see as we look at our the first appearance of our Lord. One is that we are all looking for some kind of Saviour in our lives. The only question is what kind of Saviour are we looking for? It could be a certain relationship or kind of relationship. Couples often pin their hopes and dreams on their spouse. They want him or her to be a certain way. Then they can have life, joy, satisfaction, and contentment. And here is the thing — your spouse will never live up to your expectations. They were never meant to carry the title “Messiah” in your life. And because we are search for a Messiah in the creation rather than the Creator, it will only lead to disaster and failure. Some try to find it in sex, but you can never have enough sex to gratify your longings. The satisfaction is so short lived, and it just leads to frustration and a quest for more. Why? We were never meant to find meaning and satisfaction and hope in anything earthly. There is only one who can satisfy. There is only one who is Lord, Saviour and our Messiah. Where are you looking for your Saviour today? Where are you saying — only if I could have this — then I could have life and satisfaction? The resurrected Jesus is Mary's satisfaction and he ought to be ours.

The second thing we see here is that God truly is a rewarder of those who seek him, and truly seek him. There is such a robust relationship and life for those who truly desire him. There is a delight because they live in light that their Jesus is always near. And this kind of relationship affects every relationship that they have in this life. I heard the story of certain individuals who worked in a perfume factory. Guess what they smelled like? You could smell them coming, even if you didn't see them. And if you spent time with them, others knew, because you smelled like perfume also. Here is the thing — people who diligently and persistently spend time in the presence of Jesus are being changed. They are being transformed. Listen to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians

3:18, **“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”** You spend time beholding Christ and you cannot help to be like him. And here is the thing — others are even changed. We have all had people in our lives that after we have spent time with them we feel closer to Christ. The fellowship and conversation and encouragement are all different. We smell of the gospel.

The challenge is we want to be those individuals. Our problem is that we seek so many other things, and we are so diligent and so zealous about so many things, and they could be good things, but how much and how zealously are you searching for Christ, wanting to know him and love him, and truly spend time in his presence? The spiritual principle is that he truly is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Mary sought him, and through her grief the light of the glory of Christ shone, and her life and heart were never the same. Are we as believers in Christ seeking our Lord? I want us to see those couple points to really examine our hearts to see who or what we are searching for and see that all our joys, hopes, and satisfaction are truly found in Christ.

1. We see the searching soul. Vv.14-15

One of the things I find amazing about our Lord is how patient and gentle he is with those who are his own. And you can see that with the struggles in Mary. He could have rebuked her openly for not listening to his words about his resurrection, or not seeing a different message with the tomb being empty. Also, he could have ended her pain and struggle right away by revealing himself right away. But what he is concerned with most is Mary's heart, Mary's growth in trusting him and believing in him and being transformed follower of his. So he takes her gently through where she is to where he wants her to be. And it is through letting this trial and grief continue. And again, although we do not like trials and suffering, we do rejoice in what they produce. We realize change comes through suffering. But not suffering by itself, but with the Word of God. His word becomes so much more living and active. We are to seek him during our trials. We are to learn to cast all our anxieties on him because he care for us.

So as you look at this passage do not miss the love, gentleness, and patience of Jesus before Mary. It is a picture of his love, gentleness, and patience with us. He wants her to learn truths about him and really challenge what she is believing. And it is the same for us. God wants us to seek him. Jesus is using the things you are going through to make himself known to you, but are you seeking him? Look at verse 14 here, **“Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.”** We see she might have sensed someone else was present, and she turns around. And there is Jesus. There is the One who came out of the tomb. Now the strange thing is that is the very One she has been seeking, and he is right before her and she does not recognize that fact. She does not recognize that the Lord of glory is before her. She is blind to that reality of the comfort in the midst of her grief. All her hopes are right there in the person before her.

And that is so human and one that we can relate to. What has Jesus promised? Listen to Hebrews 13:5-6, **“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we**

can confidently say, **‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’**” Amazing how in grief and in trials we can express and think we are all alone. Jesus can feel so distant. But here is the promise of our Lord — nothing will ever separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus! You and I are not alone whatever you are going through. And here our perception can be so different from reality. He is so near. He has never left you nor ever will. He is our our forever divine helper. The reason why we are even here today is because of our Lord and Saviour has never left us. Where is your perception different from the reality of what God has promised to those who love him? There is so much hope and comfort in the presence of Christ, and Christian — he is present!

Now why doesn’t Mary know it is Jesus? We see in the next verse she even mistakes him as a gardener. We know she didn’t perceive that the two individuals in the tomb were angels because of her grief. It could be that her eyes are so filled with tears, and she is in such a state that she does not recognize her Lord. It could be that just like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus he cloaked his true identity from her to help see the glory of Christ to a better and fuller seeing of him. It could be that although he had the marks of the crucifixion on him, and it was the same Jesus his body forevermore has been glorified. Maybe the best explanation is 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, **“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”** There is both continuity with the body we have and there is discontinuity with our new resurrected self. Jesus could eat and drink and be touched, but at the same time he passed through the grave clothes and later appeared in a locked room. Certainly it was the same body but oh so different.

But I really think, the reason why was he concealed his presence to Mary was to bring her to a greater seeing. Look at the next verse, **“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.’”** Again, just like the angels that spoke to Mary, Jesus asked her the same question — Why are you weeping? These are X-ray questions meant to really search the soul of the individual, and they are also a mild rebuke of where her faith and trust lies. She should expect through the words and promises of Christ that he is alive, especially with all the evidence that happens to be before her. When Thomas is challenged with the resurrection of Jesus he says unless I see and touch I will not believe. And remember, Jesus comes and shows himself and invites Thomas to touch his very wounds. But then he says down in verse 29, **“Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”** Praise God for sight, but spiritual sight is such a blessing — to be able to see and interpret what God is doing or what God has promised or his very presence with us even through the most adverse circumstances. And many have trusted in Christ with far less evidence. His Word is living and active in their lives. We are blessed when we have trusted Christ and have been given spiritual eyes to see. What we should desire is a greater capacity to see and glory in our Lord.

And this brings up a second question as Jesus really seeks to gently bring her to greater sight and faith in him. And this is the question that should not be answered in an external way but internally. Who and what are you hoping for? Where have you pinned your hope on? **“Whom are you seeking?”** And think of it because who was Mary seeking? She was seeking a dead Lord — a dead Jesus. She looks at this man and thinks, maybe as the gardener he was ordered to take the body of Jesus away. She indicates to him, just tell me where you have laid him and I will go and get him. Her whole goal in love was to do honour to her Lord. Think of a dead Saviour and Lord. What can a dead Saviour and Lord do? And the answer is nothing. Certainly he cannot be Lord because he is dead. He certainly is not reigning and ruling. And certainly if he is dead there is no hope. He cannot save, Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 15. We are men most to be pitied if Christ is not raised because we are still in our sins.

And here is the problem again — we are looking for inadequate or dead Saviours so often. It is not that we do not believe in Jesus, but in some way we have a faith in Jesus that is so faulty. We are looking to him to give us things that are the true hope of our hearts. Mary is looking for something or someone. We are looking for something or someone to be our Saviour. Could it be that part and parcel of our frustration and anger and purposeless, and jumping to one thing and then to another is that we are looking for some other Saviour and Lord rather than Jesus? Could it be in that quest to find satisfaction and rest, the answer has been before you all along in the person of Christ? If Jesus asked you the question today based on all your frustration, anger and anxiety — whom are you seeking — what you you say? Mary says — I am looking for a dead body — a corpse. What are you looking for? Oh Christian, we were meant to find that rest and satisfaction but there is only one place and one person where rest and satisfaction can be found. That happens to be in Christ. And that is where we need to turn in the searching in souls.

2. We see the soul that finds rest. V. 16.

This is such a tender passage, here Jesus takes her and reveals things about him that she could have never known unless he brought her through that terrible process of so much grief in her life. And it is such a glorious truth that so often we forget. God never wastes our trials. There is a purpose in our trials. And the ultimate purpose is that we would see Jesus — we would see him like we have never seen him before. The truths of his sacrifice and presence and love would be known like never before. Here Mary finds her Lord, she finds him whom she has been looking for all along, but oh he is so much more than she was looking for or hoped for!

This is the incredible love of how God uses trials in our lives. Listen to 1 Peter 1:6, **“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”** Look at those two words — “if necessary.” What do they tell us about our lives and trials? It indicates that God would not have us go through what we are going through if it was not necessary. God has purpose and reason for our trials. And here is what the purpose is not. It is not that we have to go through the trials in order to get the things we want. Everyone has to pay their dues. No, Jesus’ purposes are so much higher and glorious and eternal. It is to transform our wants. Peter goes on and says in 1 Peter 1:7, **“so that (here is the purpose for the “if**

necessary) the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Its all about Jesus. It is all about refinement that I may know him, be like him and see him so much more with a greater capacity in this life.

Think about it, because trials like everything else in life have been given by God and therefore are a stewardship. They are there to cause us to see ourselves and to see our Lord. And as we seek him, even when we are seeking him and blinded in many ways to the sin and unbelief in our own hearts, he begins to show us our sin and who he is. Our Lord truly is a revealer of those who seek him. Listen to Lamentations 3:25, **“The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.”** Listen also to Hebrews 11:6, **“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”** Oh we seek for so many things in this life that leave us so dry and dissatisfied. But here is a promise — God rewards those who seek him. And the reward is none other than himself!

So look at this verse because it is so touching, **“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).”** Jesus makes himself known to Mary, and in that instant all of her sorrow and anguish and grief has been vanquished. Death could not hold Christ. He is alive and that changes everything. This is not night but the dawning of a new day, and there is such a tenderness here. Right here we see that once he says her name the reality of what or who has been there all along becomes her reality. She sees. And she responds **“Rabboni!”** And I love that — teacher. She has been a disciple of Christ — a follower of him. And she recognizes him, and delights in him in utter astonishment. And this is certainly the glory of salvation — we know Christ and he knows us. Jesus said in John 10:27, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”**

Now let's take a couple lessons from this. The first is the intimate care and knowledge and love that Jesus has for his own. It is so apparent in the text. Jesus truly care for his own. Think of it because we not only know Jesus' name, but he knows our name, and he knows it intimately. He loves us and knows us like no one else in our lives. He knows the deepest things that go on in your heart. He knows everything you have said and done, and still loves you! And that also means, like Mary everything that happens to be in my life is not only there by divine appointment but loving appointment. He truly knows what is best for me. He truly loves me. This is not punishment. I might not know, like Mary, why I am going through what I am going through. It might not even make sense. She might of thought, how could he who delivered me from my affliction be put to death? But God as we saw in this passage has reason and purpose that are unique to who you are and has fashioned a particular plan for your good and his glory — that you would be shaped into none other than the person of Christ. What glory is this — that we would be so intimately known and cared for by none other than Jesus. When we finally get before Jesus it will not be as strangers who are meeting for the first time, but with one who has been with us all the time. One who knows us and truly loves us with an everlasting love. What joy is mine! I truly find my life and hope in him.

And think of the glory here because Mary is the first to see the Lord. Yes, she sought him imperfectly, but she sought him. She went early in the morning while all of the disciples slept. She went back even after the other women left and also Peter and John. And she is there still searching and truly wanting Jesus. This is effort folks. Our problem is basically two-fold. One is we want the benefits of seeing and savouring Jesus, finding of joy and satisfaction in Jesus, but we just do not want to put the effort into it. We have more study aides than ever before. Have the Bible and a plethora of sermons right on our phones, and yet there is such an epidemic of laziness when it comes to seeking the Lord. And even when people listen to a sermon and podcast it is about many trivial things rather than knowing Christ and growing in likeness to him.

The other problem is that when we are lethargic about Jesus then we are always excited about something else. The problem is never laziness in and of itself but what are we truly excited about? Where do we spend our time? What do we think about or even dream about when we have nothing else to dream or think about? It could be sports or fashion or politics or social media likes or shopping. Where is it easy to find time to do these things? How much time did you invest in these things compared to seeking Christ? Once you answer those questions you have found your Lord and Saviour. You have found what occupies your heart. Your laziness is just symptomatic of being zealous for something else.

But here is what you know about those messiahs — it is like searching for a dead body. There is so much frustration and maybe even anger in your life. Jesus wants to show you something so much better, and you know what it is — himself. Rabboni! Start to seek him, the more you seek him, this is the amazing thing — the more he will reveal himself and the more you will want to seek him. There really is satisfaction in Christ. He really does reward those who diligently seek him!