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The Resurrected Jesus and Our Sorrow

Here and Now Series

John 20:1-18

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Twenty-one years ago, my entire family and a group of students from Lincoln Berean spent the summer on mission in Beijing, China. And I distinctly remember the first time we went to Tiananmen Square, right there in the heart of Beijing, and there were people that were milling all about. But then I saw this line and it looked like people were in a queue, kind of waiting to get in somewhere. And I wondered, "What is that?" Well, I discovered that it was the mausoleum of Chairman Mao, and you see, if you were willing to wait for hours in the hot sun and the humidity, you could go inside. And when you went inside, you wouldn't just see a memorial. You wouldn't even just see a grave. You wouldn't even just see a casket. You could literally see the embalmed body of Mao, and hundreds of people were lined up that day to do so. Mao died in 1976, which means we are approaching 50 years since his death, and yet still today, people will line up to go into that mausoleum. In fact, over 200 million people have done so.

If I took you further north, we could go into Russia, and we could go right to the heart of Moscow. And we could get in a line, and there we could go in to see the body of Vladimir Lenin, who led the Communist Revolution in Russia. Well, Lenin died in 1924. That means we are one year from marking 100 years since his death. He has been dead for far longer than he was alive, and yet still today, people line up to go and see his body. And I wonder, "Why?" And I think there is something about us as people that just really want to somehow get closer to and have some sort of experience with significant people, be they good or bad, and with events and places where history was made. Something in us wants to be able to get closer to those events, and to have a bit of an experience of what took place there and then.

Last week we talked about Easter. And as we do, we talked about something that happened thousands of years ago. For us, we talk about something that happened on the other side of the world, and we open up and we reflect back on what happened there and then. But what makes Easter completely unique among all the holidays and events that have taken place in the history of the world? What makes Jesus completely unique among all the people who have ever lived in the history of the world, is only Jesus. He is the only person who can actually completely change your life right here and now. The problem is, sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we struggle to believe it, especially when life is difficult. Sometimes, in our darkest days and in our deepest sorrow, it's incredibly difficult for us to see the difference Jesus makes as the resurrected One, here and now. And that's what we want to talk about this morning.

So let's open up our Bibles together to John, Chapter 20. Last week Ryan walked us through the resurrection narrative from Matthew's Gospel in Matthew 28. This week we're going to look at that same period, but we're going to look at it from John's account. So, we begin in John 20 and verse 1:

> **Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark…** (*NASB John 20:1a)

Now, let's stop right there. In this church, there are many excellent Bible students. Many of you study your Bible and, as we get into this account in John, and even immediately you're going to say, "Wait a minute, there's something different about John's account than what we just went through last week. Matthew said there was more than one woman. Here, John just talks about Mary Magdalene. What's going on?" You know, people wonder about that. Sometimes they struggle with it. They'll read something in one Gospel account, and it doesn't quite seem exactly the same as in another Gospel account. Some will even use that to make a case to say, "Oh, you know, the Scripture is full of inconsistencies. You can't trust it."

So why are there different gospel accounts? Well, let me use an illustration. Some people these days ask me this question, "Why does Lincoln Berean embrace a team-teaching model with multiple teaching pastors?" And I say, "Well, let me answer your question with a question. Why is it that God gave us four distinct Gospel accounts, written by four very different people, all borne along by the same Holy Spirit, but with very different personalities and perspectives, and even slightly different purposes?" It's because in the composite, we get a much fuller understanding of who Jesus is, and what His plan is for the world and for our lives. John is actually writing for a little bit different purpose. John's purpose in writing is that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that, by so believing, we may find life in His name. And so one of the techniques that John uses is he likes to zoom in on individual encounters with Jesus. In fact, from here going forth, for the rest of his Gospel, John will simply tell the story of four people and their encounters with Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Peter, John himself, and Thomas. And so he starts doing that right here in verse 1:

> **Now on the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved** (that's John)**, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."** (Vs. 1-2)

Notice by the way, she didn't say, "I don't know where they have laid Him." She said, "We don't know where they have laid Him." There was more than just Mary Magdalene there. But again, John is focusing in, zooming in on her story, and now John is going to take the camera and he's going to shift it for a period of time to the story of Peter and John himself. Verse 3:

> **So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*; but he did not go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.** (Vs. 3-8)

So, Mary Magdalene sees that the stone is rolled away. She can see, even though it's dark, that there's nobody in there. So she goes running and she finds Peter and John and she tells them, "They've taken the Lord, and I don't know where they put Him." Immediately the two of them hotfoot it off to the tomb. Now John was a much younger man than Peter, so he beats him to the tomb. But here we see just a little bit of their personalities as well. As John gets there, he stops; he stoops; he looks, and he observes. Not Peter! Peter always blows on ahead. So Peter comes up from behind, and he gets to the tomb. And what does it say? He went right in. And Peter saw those **linen wrappings lying there, and the facecloth**. And it's interesting to look at what John is trying to help us understand. Did you notice that in verse five and verse six and verse seven, he speaks of **linen wrappings**. And this is important for us, because, again, John is trying to help us understand that Jesus was the Christ. And so he is making for us, the case for the resurrection.

We have people who, for centuries, have sought to debunk the resurrection. They try to come up with different theories of what actually happened. A couple of the popular ones are that Jesus' body was stolen and taken out of the grave. Another one is called the *Swoon Theory*, as though Jesus was not actually dead, but He just passed out, and in the cool of the tomb, He revived. Somehow, in His injured state, He pushed away the rock, and He wandered off. And so those are a couple of theories of what might have happened. John wants to make it clear for us that is not what happened because, let me just assure you, grave robbers don't bother to unwrap the linens. Grave robbers certainly didn't care what was on the head, and have it separately, neatly folded. And anyone who was going to revive and come out of a tomb, probably isn't going to stand there and make sure their head covering is nicely placed back on the bench.

Think of Lazarus in John 11, when Jesus did this miracle. He says, "Lazarus, come forth," and the text tells us the dead man came out, but he came out wrapped in the wrappings. And He told them, "Unbind him and let him go." Those theories do not hold water, and John wants to make sure that we understand exactly what is happening here. So he focuses repeatedly on the linen wrappings, and in verse seven, the contrast of this facecloth and the linen wrappings. So here are the linen wrappings, and then he says there's a facecloth that had been on his head, not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Scholars differ a little bit on what that means. It perhaps was wound around Jesus' face, and it's exactly as it was in the place where His head was, and His body was simply resurrected out of the facecloth and the wrappings. Others think it was carefully folded and placed there. Either way, it is evidence of intentionality. This was not a robbery. This was not an accident. This was not a resuscitation. This was a resurrection.

And our English language somehow sometimes struggles to capture all the things that the original authors were intending to communicate. Notice in verse five, in verse six, and verse eight, all three of those verses read, "He *saw*," "He *saw*," "He *saw*." The word translated in English every single time is "saw". But the late theologian Arthur Pink points out that every one of those words translated "saw" was actually a different word in Greek, and each of them had a slightly different nuance. What we see in this text is a progression of understanding. So here's the scene: John comes running to the tomb, and he stoops down in verse five, and he *saw* the linen wrappings lying there. And that is kind of a word that means that you look at something and you make an observation. It is the same word that was used in verse one: ***Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb. Even though it's dark, she "saw" the stone already rolled away.*** So, John gets there first. He looks in and he makes an observation. There are the linen wrappings. Then Peter comes to the tomb. Peter goes

in, and now the word that is translated "saw" in verse five means more *to gaze for the purpose of analysis*. Can't you just picture Peter in that tomb, looking at the scene in front of him? He's seeing the linen wrappings. He's seeing the folded head covering, and he's analyzing what he is seeing and wondering: "What in the world does this mean?" And then in verse 8 we read:

> **So the other disciple** (John) **who had first come to the tomb also entered, and he saw and believed.**

And this word "saw" implies more of a sense of discerning. It is the same word that was used when Jesus was baptized, and he looked and "saw" the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. It's the same word that was used in Acts 7, when Steven was being stoned and he looked into heaven, and he "saw" the glory of God. It's the same word that was used in Acts 9, when Barnabas is describing to the apostles how Saul had seen Jesus on the Damascus Road. And so here is this beloved disciple of Jesus, who has now gone into that tomb, and he is observing that those things are there. Peter has seen and analyzed these things, and now he is seeing what is right in front of him. And as a result of the evidence in front of him, he is believing that Jesus has risen from the dead. The evidence is conclusive in front of him. And yet notice something really important that he says in verse 9:

> **For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.**

You know, Ryan mentioned this last week, but it's easy for us to sit here today in 2023, and many of us have studied many of these things, and we kind of understand how it all fits together. But we lose sight of the fact that they didn't know what was going on. They're in the middle of the story. They're in the middle of the mystery. Jesus had been trying to prepare them. He had been trying to show them what was coming, but they could not comprehend it. And we talked about how often we have these big celebrations at Easter. We talk about the resurrection, and then as a church, we just sort of turn the page and move on. And maybe that creates for all of us sort of an assumption you have. You have Good Friday. You have Easter, and then you just move into the book of Acts with the advancement of the church and our mission today. But that's not how it took place. Beginning with the text that we're about to read, and then continuing for a period of 40 days, Jesus appears to the disciples multiple times in multiple places, and at one point, to over 500 people. All of this happened over 40 days, progressively helping them to understand the wisdom of the plan of God. That, as John now writes here, in fact according to the Scripture, the Messiah had to be crucified and had to rise from the dead. And so they are progressively discovering the plan of God as they encounter the resurrected Christ.

So we thought, wouldn't it be great during the exact same timeframe for us, during these six weeks, to do the same thing? To, together, go on that journey to encounter the resurrected Christ and to progressively see His plan as it unfolds from His ministry before the cross, to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them that it was actually for their good that He would go away, and we'll see more about that in a couple of minutes in the text. So John wants to make it clear that, as yet, they didn't understand the full picture. But according to verse 8, on the evidence in front of them alone, he believed. He believed that Christ was raised from the dead. And so you picture these guys in awe, in wonderment, but still some bewilderment. And then verse 10 tells them:

So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

So now John takes the lens, and he is going to focus us right back on Mary Magdalene. She came early. She saw the stone rolled away. She saw the grave empty. She ran and got them. They go running to the tomb, and she has also made her way back to the tomb. And that's where she is, and that's where she intends to remain. Verse 11:

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

Notice that twice the verse indicates her **weeping**. This is a woman who is overcome with grief. This is a woman in utter sorrow, who absolutely refuses to leave the tomb. And it raises an important question for us. Who was Mary Magdalene? You know, there have been wild rumors and stories about Mary Magdalene—many things that people say about her that have absolutely no basis in historical fact, or in the biblical record. The truth is, we don't know a lot about Mary Magdalene, but we do know some very important things. She shows up in the four Gospel accounts twelve times, and we also know the most about her from the account in Luke, chapter 8, where Jesus is in the middle of His Galilean ministry. He is preaching from town to town, and He is with His disciples, but not just the men alone. There are also women who were following Him as disciples. And so we read in verse 1: **…and the twelve were with Him**, and then in verse 2 of chapter 8, it says, **and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sickness: Mary who was called Magdalene**. And so we know a little bit something about her, as well, because typically a woman in this culture would be identified by relationship, such as: Mary, the wife of, or Mary, the mother of, but here she is called Mary Magdalene, and her association is not by relationship. It's by geography, because she is from Magdala, which was a town which was about six miles to the southwest of Capernaum. So apparently, somewhere along the way, Jesus comes, and she hears His ministry. She encounters Him, but she doesn't just have an encounter. We're told in Luke 8:2-3: **Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.**

So Mary was a woman possessed by seven demons, and at some point Jesus sets her free. She's now among a group of the female disciples and followers of Christ, who was with Him there in Galilee during His ministry, but not only in Galilee, but also coming with Him to Judah. Now, we do not have in Scripture, the account of Jesus' first meeting Mary Magdalene and setting her free, but we do have other accounts that might help us understand a little bit about her story.

Matthew tells us about the boy who was demon possessed, and about his broken-hearted father, who brings his beloved son to Jesus. And he says, "Please, please, can you help him? Would you heal him? This demon literally takes my son, and sometimes literally throws him into the fire. And at other times he throws him into the water, burning him with fire, then trying to kill him in the water. My son is suffering desperately." Jesus heals the boy and sets him free.

And in the same chapter where we read about Mary Magdalene in Luke 8, later in that chapter, we read about Jesus going to Gadara. There He finds a man with so many demons that he is called Legion. And how is this man described? What was his life like? It says, for quite some time, he

had worn no clothing. He was literally an outcast, and he was apparently such a threat to himself and others, that they continually tried to chain him and bind him. Imagine that life: he would literally break those chains. And when Jesus encounters him there, he is living completely alone, far from everyone among the tombs. This man was oppressed, as Jesus said, harassed and helpless, distressed, and downcast—this man whose life was utterly destroyed. Jesus finds him as an example, exemplifying what it means to be the walking dead—literally living in the cemetery among the tombs. It is a vivid picture for you and me of the utter destruction and chaos that comes from sin and separation from God, and the destruction in our world. This man is an example of the walking dead, until he meets Jesus. Jesus sets him free, and everything about his life completely changes. He immediately wants what anyone would want, and that is to be with Jesus. He says, "Let me go with you," but Jesus told this man, "No, I have another work for you. Go home and tell people what God has done for you."

Well, Mary Magdalene had seven demons. Imagine what life was like for this woman. Imagine what had been done to her. Imagine what was said about her. Imagine the loneliness, the isolation. Imagine the oppression, the depression—all of the things that she would have faced. And then she meets Jesus, and He completely sets her free…completely changes her story…completely changes her life. What does she want now? Just to be with Him in pure-hearted agape love, to be near her Savior. So she followed Him with the other women around Galilee. She followed Him all the way to Judah. But that is not all. When almost everyone deserted Jesus, who was there at the cross, watching her Savior and her master, her healer, and her friend die? It was Mary Magdalene at the cross, watching the whole thing as He is brutally executed. We are also told in Scripture, she was there on Good Friday at the tomb, while Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus quickly wrapped and bound Jesus' body to place Him in the tomb. Before the Sabbath began, Mary Magdalene was there, not wanting to leave the side of the body of the One who meant so much to her. And thus, very early in the morning, as John said, while it was still dark, once the Sabbath is done, she's back. She's there to care for and anoint the body of Jesus. And then she finds the body is gone and, oh my goodness, she's overcome with grief! She's **weeping**. She saw Him killed. She knows He's dead, and now His body is gone. She can't imagine where He's been taken, and she only wants to minister to the dead body of her Lord. And so John says in verse 11 that ***she stood and wept and looked into the tomb***. And then in verse 12:

> **…she saw two angels in white** (Luke says dazzling white) **sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."** (Vs. 12-13)

Notice her words. What did she say? The angels ask her, **"Woman, why are you weeping?"** And she says, **"They've taken away my Lord and I don't know where they've laid Him."** Now go back to verse 2. When she came early to the morning to the tomb, she sees the body is gone, she runs to Peter and John and says, **"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid Him."** She says almost the identical thing now at the tomb to the angels, only now it's not **the Lord**. Now, it's really personal. It is **my Lord**, and she is in a state of mind and a frame of mind that she is 100% convinced that Jesus is dead. She saw Him killed. She watched the whole thing. But John is trying to help us understand and see the progression, that that's not the entire story, which is why he brought us through the account with Peter and John,

through the wrappings, all of this detail. And now he is progressing that story with **two angels**, one sitting where Jesus' feet had been, and one sitting where Jesus' head was. And when Mary looks into the tomb, and there are the wrappings, there's the evidence that led John to believe there's more evidence. There are two angels sitting there. And what does she say when they say, "Why are you weeping?" She says nearly the exact same thing she said before any of that had been figured out. Then in verse 14, we read:

> **When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. And Jesus said to her** (same question)**, "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."** (Vs. 14-15)

Again, 100% convinced Jesus is dead, and now, as a loving and faithful follower, she just wants to take care of His body, to be near Him where He was.

When I was in seventh grade, my grandpa died. At that point in my story, I would have called him my best friend, and I remember going to that funeral. People were milling about all kinds of different places, but I just kept going to one place, to the casket, which was still open. I just wanted to be near him, even though he was dead. How could I go wandering off and talk to other people? My grandpa, whom I loved, was lying there. I wanted to be near to him. Before they closed the casket, I asked, "Can I have his glasses?" They took them off, and they gave them to me. I wanted to have some part of him; I still have them to this day. You see, friends, sometimes when we're in our darkest days, sometimes when we are in our deepest sorrow, sometimes we can't see anything other than the grief that we face. What a picture that is!

And I believe what happened here was not only for Mary's sake. I believe it was for our sake as well. What did the angels ask her? **"Woman, why are you weeping?"** What did Jesus ask her? **"Woman, why are you weeping?"** And then He ups the ante and says, **"Whom are you seeking?"** Not *what*? Not *what body* are you looking for but, "**Whom are you seeking?"** Now from our reading, those questions can seem kind of cold, impersonal, but a part of why I believe they spoke that way is because what is happening here is truth. That was not just for Mary; it is universal. My friends, sometimes when we are going through our darkest days, God wants to say to you and me, "Woman, why are you weeping?" "Man, why are you weeping?"

Now we know that sin leads to death, which was the curse. And we know that death rips us apart and sin destroys, and some of you are grieving. Last week I had multiple conversations in this very room with people who wept with me, because they have lost people so dear to them, and they literally didn't know how to go on without the one they so deeply loved. Maybe, for others of you right now, things are going really well in your life and story. And if so, I rejoice with you. But the fact is, every person in this room has or will go through dark days…days of loss, days of sorrow, and days of suffering, and we will grieve. We should grieve. But, as Bryan said when he taught from our study in Thessalonians, "We are not the people who grieve without hope, because sometimes there's a greater story. God is writing a grander narrative."

And here is an extreme example, where Mary is literally entirely certain Jesus is dead, and in her grief, she can't even see what's right in front of her, even when it's Jesus Himself. And so the

angels say, "**Why are you weeping?"** And she focuses again on His body. And when Jesus says, **"Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"** He focuses again on His body.

You know, we talked last week about the propositional objective truth of the resurrection, and, man, I am so thankful for it. Friends, we, as Christians, have every logical reason to know and understand that the resurrection is a fact of history. Our faith rises and falls upon it, and we can stand confidently on the objective fact that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the dead. And that propositional truth makes all the difference in the world. But sometimes it doesn't make a bit of a difference in our lives, because our faith is not just propositional. It's not just objective. It is so much more, because it is personal, and it is about not just truths, but about relationship with this same Jesus who appeared to Mary in that garden tomb. And so after she has answered Jesus, Verse 16:

> **Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).**

Not Rabbi, but my teacher, my master, and here is this moment, literally one word changes everything. One word…as Jesus speaks the name of this grieving woman.

I'm going to ask you to do something a little weird. Just go with me. I'm going to count to three, and then I want everyone in this room to speak your own name out loud. Okay: 1, 2, 3: Jeff. You know, this is a large church, and part of what that means is that there are more people in this room who do not even know your name than people who do know your name. And honestly, as a pastor, that breaks my heart, and we are continually seeking to have this be the kind of place where every person is known.

But let me share another perspective. There is One in this room with us right now, today, who knows your name, who knows not only your name, He knows everything about you! Everything that has ever been done to you, everything that you have ever done, and He longs to be gracious to you. He gave His very life that He might be able to have a personal relationship with you: to speak your name in the midst of your darkest days, in the midst of your deepest sorrow, to help you lift up your head and to see that our darkest days and our deepest sorrows are not the end. They're not the fullness of the story which He's writing in our lives. There is more. There is more to the story for us, just as there was for Mary. And so He speaks her name, and she turns to Him, and this scene goes from weeping in sorrow to what I'm sure were tears still flowing, but now they are tears of joy! And she turns and falls at His feet, grabs Him and says, "My master, my teacher." And what a beautiful picture it would have been, as this woman, who moments before, could not see beyond her grief to believe, even for a second, no matter what, that there was resurrection and there was life, to now encountering the very One who was resurrected! What a beautiful moment! And then in verse 17:

> **Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"**

Now at first, the beginning of verse 17 can sound to us, from a distance, kind of cold. Like, "Why is He saying, 'Stop clinging to me?'" Well, I believe that wasn't necessarily the first immediate thing He said. I believe there was probably a beautiful scene of being reunited for Mary and Jesus. But Jesus is also beginning in this process, helping her, and even through her, helping the disciples start to understand His plan, what is taking place, and that He is going to ascend to the Father.

He's saying a couple of things here. First of all, "I'm not ascending yet. You don't have to hold on to Me; you're going to see Me multiple times." And she does, with the disciples, multiple times over the coming 40 days. But He is ascending to the Father. Mary, in her heart of hearts, wanted one thing. She wanted back what she had before the cross: Jesus physically with them, His ministry to continue. That's what they all wanted. But Jesus wants them to begin to understand it's not going to be the same. It's going to be different. "Do you remember what I told you? I'm going away. Do you remember I told you in John 16 that it is for your good that I go away, because then the Helper, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit will come." And so, over these 40 days, Jesus begins to walk them through what things had been like before the cross, what was the purpose of the cross and the resurrection. And now the coming of the Holy Spirit is foreshadowed in John's account, and comes to full fruition fifty days later, at the day of Pentecost. And so He is leading them forward saying, "From now on, Mary, even though what you think you want more than anything is to be physically present with Me, something even better is coming." Because Mary, on her best day in Jesus' earthly ministry, had only a little bit of access to the Savior. But upon the coming of the Holy Spirit, because of the resurrection of Christ, she and every person in this room who knows Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord has access to Him 24 hours a day, every single moment of every day of the year.

There is never a moment when you are not but one decision toward being close to Jesus, toward experiencing His presence through His Word, through His people, by His Spirit, which indwells us, being able to draw near in our darkest days, and in our deepest sorrows. And Jesus wants Mary to understand, "This is good news," and He sends her to be the first person to begin to go and tell this good news. And what did He tell her to tell them? He says, "**Go to My brethren**," first time He's ever said that. Now we see everything has changed because of the death, burial, and resurrection, because of the finished work of Jesus. Now men and women can be brought back into relationship with God, and now we can literally be brothers and sisters with the very Son of God. And so for the first time, He calls them **My brethren**. And then He says, **"Say to them, "I ascend to My Father."** Back then the Jews thought it was blasphemy for Jesus Himself to refer to God as Father. But now He's taking it to a whole higher level. He says, **"To My Father and your Father, to My God, and your God,"** because the resurrection changes everything. It changes everything about our relationship with God. And Mary is discovering it for the very first time. And so, verse 18:

> **Mary Magdalene came announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that* He had said these things to her**.

What a beautiful picture it was! As Mary begins the process of what God wants to be true in each and every one of our lives, even in our darkest days, even in our deepest sorrow, that we would, *"See the Lord*," that we would understand that He is writing a story that transcends all of the evil

and the brokenness, and the hurt and the pain of this fallen world. He is calling every single one of us to go and tell the good news that we have seen the Lord.

You know, when I was in Beijing, I never got it in that line. I didn't wait hours in the sun to see that body. After all, why would I? I mean, other than maybe satisfying a little bit of a sense of morbid curiosity, what could that dead body do for me today? You know, if I were to take you with me to Jerusalem, and we said, "Oh, let's go see the tomb?" I'd have to be honest with you. I'd say, "Well, there's a little bit of a debate about that. Some people will think it's the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Some people think it's the Garden Tomb," and you'd say to me, "Well, which one is right?" And I'd say, "Well, nobody really knows." And you'd say, "Why?" and I would say, "Because He is not there." He was dead for a short period of time. He was in a tomb for a very short period of time. He has never gone back in a tomb again. His resurrection is not simply an event in history that we commemorate. It is a very present and ongoing reality that we celebrate. In your darkest of days, in your deepest of sorrows, oh, how I pray that you will lift up your eyes, seeing not only your pain, seeing not only your struggle, seeing not only the hurt and the brokenness of this world, but seeing Jesus, who is right with you, right here and now.

> *Jesus, we pray, God, that we would see You, that we would look up, that we would believe, that we would not be a people who celebrate what happened there and then, but that we would be a people who understand Your resurrection changes everything about here and now, even in our deepest sorrow. Oh, God, in our grief we can become so confused, so discouraged, even so disabled, so help us, God. Lift up our eyes that we might see You and the greater story You're writing. In Your name we pray, Amen.*

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SPRING 2023 // WEEK 1

Life Group Questions

Easter Here and Now // April 15-16, 2023

The Resurrected Jesus and Our Sorrow // John 20:1-18

Introduction

Welcome back for our Spring session! Together we'll explore how Jesus is the Living Christ; just as present to us today as He was to Mary Magdalene in the garden on the morning after His resurrection. Jesus met her in her sorrow, and He meets us there too.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1. What is one worship song or lyric that has really spoken to your heart?

2. What are you looking forward to in this post-Easter session of Life Group?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) How did the weekend service have an impact on you as you went about your week?

2) What do you see in the text this week (and last week) that helps us to see and believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead and the resurrection is a credible historical event?

   How does this make a difference in your faith and in how you live your life?

3) John gives us a very personal look at Mary and Jesus in our passage this week. What words are used to describe their relationship?

   How does Jesus meet Mary in her sorrow?

   Think of a time when you experienced sorrow and disappointment. What was your relationship with Jesus like through that experience? If you are comfortable, share with your group.

4) Mary repeats the same concern in verses 2 and 13, *"they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they put Him,"* and she seems to have no thought of the resurrection. Why do you suppose this is her repeated response during this time of sorrow?

   When have you noticed grief and sorrow impacting your perspective on reality and your ability to see truth? What was that like for you and the others around you?

5) In our Winter Session, we also talked about what grieving is like for those who believe in Jesus. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 and compare it to the words Jesus spoke to Mary in John 20:17. **What is the message of hope that Jesus gives?**

How does having that kind of hope affect you here and now?

6) At the close of this scene, we see Mary proclaiming the good news, "I have seen the Lord." **What do you think made the difference in Mary remaining a faithful disciple rather than falling into fear and hiding as some of the other disciples did?**

When in your life have you sensed Jesus asking you to tell others, "I have seen the Lord"? What was that like for you? (Did you waffle between faith and fear, did you step out by faith, or do you regret a missed opportunity?)

*See the Prayer Focus below for follow-up to this question.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: Mary Magdelene was an unlikely first witness to the risen Jesus Christ. Yet, she didn't let the way others viewed her hold her back from the mission Jesus had given her. She boldly announced, "I have seen the Lord."

1. Pray to be aware of opportunities to share times you have seen the Lord Jesus work in your life.
2. Ask God to give you boldness when you have a chance to share.
3. Pray for other members of your group to also take steps of faith in sharing about Jesus with others.

Scripture Focus: Read Psalm 40 throughout the week, paying special attention to the way God sees, hears, and meets the needs of the writer. How does this remind you of the way Jesus came to Mary in the garden? You may want to journal a response or listen to an audio version Psalm 40 to make it a multi-sensory exercise.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?