

January 24, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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**SEEING IS BELIEVING; BELIEVING IS ANNOUNCING**  
**John 20:11-18**

I never tire of hearing people tell their stories about how Christ saved them from sin. Many of the stories I have heard are unique regarding the circumstances that brought a sinner face-to-face with Christ. I have learned that often God uses other people, sometimes family, sometimes friends, sometimes complete strangers to introduce sinners to Jesus. Always there is the common thread of God orchestrating circumstances to cause a person to hear the good news that Jesus saves.

The New Testament has many stories like that. We know about people like John, Andrew, Peter, Nathanael and Philip who were among the first to follow Jesus. We remember the great story of Matthew who stood up and left everything to follow, of Zacchaeus who was born again in a sycamore tree, and of Mary Magdalene from whom Jesus cast out seven demons.

This Mary is the person in focus in our text in John twenty. She met Jesus, knew Jesus, loved Jesus, and followed Jesus all the way to the cross. We cannot help but wonder what she believed about Jesus. It appears that she, like most of Jesus' followers, was quite earth-bound in her faith in Him. That is, she and the disciples really expected Jesus to restore Israel as a nation of grandeur. When the Romans killed Jesus and two kind men put His body in the tomb, that meager faith was shattered.

But the story of our text is full of the wonderful news that Mary, like so many others, finally understood who Jesus was and what Jesus does. Once their faith was fixed on the divine work of God the Son, these people had to tell the good news. The eleven apostles gave their

lives telling the news. That is precisely what Jesus told Mary to do. He told her to go and tell the good news.

It is instructive to watch Jesus' method of revealing Himself to individuals and then to groups of people. He could have called everyone to a big convention at the arena in Caesarea and there revealed Himself in all the glory of His glorified body. But instead, Jesus systematically revealed Himself to individuals, a few at a time. He knew who should believe Him, when and how.

For example, follow His pattern in the Gospel accounts and in Acts. On the first day after His resurrection, He showed Himself to the women who were on their way from the tomb (Mat. 28:9), to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11), to Simon (Luke 24:34), to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13), and finally to ten apostles who were meeting in a locked room (John 20:19). A week later Jesus met with the eleven apostles (John 20:26), and probably it was about that time that He had breakfast with seven disciples who were fishing on the Sea of Galilee (John 21). Then within the next 40 days, Jesus met with the eleven apostles again (Mat. 28:16), with 500 believers at one time (1 Cor. 15:7), and finally to eleven apostles and possibly others on the Mount of Olives as He returned to the Father (Acts 1:6-8).

Mary's meeting with Jesus demonstrates many of the common experiences people have when the truth about Jesus the Savior finally breaks through to them.

**Contrition (vv.11-13).**

We find Mary weeping. Weeping indicates sadness. *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb (v.11).* In this case, the weeping is quite a sad matter because there was no reason to weep. Of course Mary was weeping because the tomb was empty. That should have been the very reason for NOT weeping. She should have been excited that the dead body was gone. She should weep if Jesus' body is still there in the tomb. And we should weep with her. If His body was still in the tomb, all of Christ's promises failed. It meant that His sacrifice for sins failed, there was no atonement for sin, and we are still in our sins and unreconciled to God.

It is so easy for us to criticize Mary for weeping while her reason for joy was right there at hand. But we too are often so blind. How often have we been forced into those times in life when the questions mount but the answers are not found? In those times, not only does life not seem to improve but it seems to get worse. Therefore, we conclude that God is obviously unconcerned, or unaware, or unjust, or unfair, or unkind. Yet none of those things are true because God is present in our circumstances and working them for His glory.

That kind of spiritual blindness offers no hope in difficult circumstances. Mary was weeping because she couldn't see Jesus. She was demonstrating that kind of spiritual blindness that renders all of us to be "little faiths." Mary was like Jacob who, while God was leading his sons to safety, security, and prosperity through Joseph, was distraught that life was unfair. Even while God was clearing the road for Jacob to be restored to his son, Jacob was miserable and convinced he would never see Joseph. We can easily demonstrate Jacob's little faith also.

Little faith causes sadness (vv.12-13). Mary looked into the tomb and saw two messengers who wondered what was wrong with her (vv.12-13a). *And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet (v.12). They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (v.13a).* When the angels asked Mary why she was weeping, they were not looking for an answer to a question. In fact, their question was a rebuke because by this time Mary should have heard and become convinced that Jesus was alive.

Furthermore, if Mary had been listening, Jesus would have taught enough information previously that she should have come to the correct conclusion—that Jesus was risen. He had taught that He would come out of the earth like Jonah came out of the fish (Matthew 12:39). Mary must have been on a picnic at the lake that day.

Little faith does not recall the Lord's promises. In response to the angels' question, *She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (v.13b).* That is why she was crying? Mary was so "earth" focused, so "life" focused. Well, isn't that what we would expect. In real life, people die, they are buried, and Mary was convinced that is what happened to Jesus.

In real life, she wanted to add spices to Jesus' body to show honor. Yes, but all that is what goes on in the confines of temporary, earthly life. In eternity (the sphere in which God operates), none of that stuff mattered. Who would shake Mary out of this funk, and how? She needed a good confrontation with the Author of eternal life.

### **Confrontation (vv.14-16).**

Mary was confused (vv.14-15). In a very touching scene, it appears that Jesus was unknown to her. *Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus (v.14).* On one hand, maybe it was difficult for anyone to recognize Jesus after He rose with a glorified body. We know that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus. The disciples fishing on Lake Galilee didn't recognize Jesus at first. And yet, when Jesus entered the upper room, the eleven disciples sure knew who He was. His body bore marks of the wounds. At the seashore, we discovered that Jesus could cook fish and eat it like we do. But at the same time, He could rise from the tomb without disturbing the grave clothes and could enter through closed doors.

These descriptions show that Jesus proved the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. We just do not know to what extent Jesus proved this truth. Paul wrote, *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 (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).*

On the other hand, in Mary's emotional trauma, it would have been easy for her not to recognize Jesus. We generally draw conclusions based on presuppositions. Mary presupposed that Jesus was dead and His body was missing. Therefore, she did not expect to be talking to Jesus. So, too, most people presuppose that Jesus could not have been God, or that He really did not die, or, that if He died, He did not rise. Therefore, they cannot possibly recognize Him as their eternally living Savior.

Mary was so focused on explainable, earthly things that she could not imagine the blessing that stood near her. *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" (v.15b).* What sad words those are, *supposing Him to be the gardener.* They betray the fact that Mary had no thought of a risen Savior. To her, there was no possibility that Jesus was not dead. She was still focused on meeting the need of re-anointing the body and re-burying it because she had the financial means to do it. Luke shed a bit of light on Mary's where-withal when he wrote: *and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means (Luke 8:2-3).* Financial plenty is never good when it makes us independent of our Master.

Mary was like so many religious people. She was sad because of circumstances that were beyond her control. We, too, often become sad because of personal loss. It is to be expected. We might even become distraught like Mary. She was distraught because what she wanted was gone. But even in her loss, it appears that she was still determined to get things under control.

In spite of Mary's confused, unbelieving, distraught, and trying-to-get-control condition, Jesus showed concern. *Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" (v.15a).* Notice that Jesus posed two questions. In Jesus' first question there was rebuke: "You shouldn't be weeping." Her Friend was alive. Her Redeemer had paid for sin. Her Savior wanted to give her eternal life.

Jesus' second question pressed Mary for an explanation for what kind of Messiah she thought Jesus was. What kind of person was Mary looking for? Did she long for a dead body of a mere man whose quest to restore Israel came to a horrible end? What kind of Savior do you want? Do you want a Savior who will forgive your sins and then let you do whatever you choose? Do you want a Teacher who does not care what you know about Him? Do you want a Master who really doesn't care if you serve Him and become like Him? Jesus' question could be boiled down to, "Are you looking for the PERSON who taught you that He came from God and would return to God?"

Mary quickly became convinced (v.16). The turning point was when she realized that Jesus knows. *Jesus said to her, "Mary."* One word from Jesus' lips removed all doubt, all spiritual blindness. Mary really was one of this Shepherd's sheep. Jesus had taught regarding Himself, *To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice (John 10:3-4).*

He speaks and the sound of His voice. . . . *She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).* Notice that she did not address Him as the miracle worker, the provider of food, the healer. It is as though all His teaching suddenly jelled in her mind.

### **Commission (vv.17-18).**

As soon as Mary responded in faith, Jesus told her to go and tell. *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'" (v.17).* It is good for us, like Mary, to desire Jesus' presence. But it was not good for her to cling to Jesus.

How do we answer this dilemma? Jesus told Mary not to cling to Him, but invited Thomas to put his hand into the nail scars in His hands. The circumstances were different. In the case with Thomas, he had vowed not to believe that Jesus was risen unless he could put his finger in the nail marks in Jesus' hands. Jesus showed up and called Thomas on his vow. *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:27).* Jesus told Thomas to reach out his finger and to place his hand in His side.

It was a completely different situation when Jesus commanded Mary to stop clinging or continually touching. He did not use the same wording at all. Also, Jesus addressed on ongoing action. In the Greek New Testament, a present tense verb connected to a negative particle almost always means "stop doing that." By hanging on to Jesus, Mary gave evidence that she did not want Jesus to leave her alone again. We can understand that. She, like the others, had been distraught about the death of Jesus and then worse because they

thought someone stole His body. But now was not the time for clinging because there was work to be done before He returned to heaven and the Heavenly Father. Therefore, Jesus essentially said to Mary, “*Stop hanging on to Me as if you fear that I am about to disappear. That comes later. Now is the time to tell the good news.*”

It is right for the person who meets Jesus to go and tell the good news. To that end, Jesus instructed Mary to go and tell *His brothers* the good news. This simple command is packed full of important information. Jesus said, “*Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’*” (v.17b). He identified the frightened, confused, forsaking, denying apostles as His brothers. How can such a relationship even be possible? Jesus had completed the sacrifice to open the door for reconciliation. Jesus was going to heaven where He pleads with the offended Father to forgive us based on His sacrifice. The resurrection and ascension opened the door for us to be joint heirs with Him, children of God.

Therefore, we still enjoy great benefits won through our Master’s sacrifice. As Paul wrote, *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!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16)*. The writer to the Hebrews stated, *For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Hebrews 2:11-12)*. That is astonishingly good news for someone who realizes that his or her sins have offended God.

How would Mary respond to Jesus’ gentle rebuke? How would we respond? The text literally states, “She is telling.” John wrote, *Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” – and that he had said these things to her*” (v.18). That is a wonderful picture in a few short words. *She came . . . she announced*. The present tense verbs John wrote here really stand out. Except the English text doesn’t indicate present tense. We must remember that John wrote this account over 50 years after the fact. It seems like he would have written “Mary went and announced” (as the ESV translates the Greek). But this use of the historical present is

intended to draw the reader into the action—even though it is a past event. I like the idea of the present tense because, if translated strictly as present tense, it shows the idea that Mary’s experience impacted her so deeply that going and telling the good news became the characteristic of her life. That idea might very well be expressed by the perfect tense (a past action with continuing results) used in the phrase “I have seen.”

Jesus commissioned Mary to go out and announce, “*I have seen the Lord.*” The particular Greek word translated *seen* (οἶδω) means to perceive, to understand, to experience. It involves far more than simple observation. This is likely Mary’s confession that she now understood the truth about Jesus. That He is indeed the promised Messiah who would be born in David’s line and who one day will rule from David’s throne.

But overshadowing that great future event is the reality that Jesus of Nazareth is as John called Him, “*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” The resurrection shed all the light necessary on Jesus’ teachings about righteousness, about His challenge to take up one’s cross and follow Him, about His explanation of the seed falling on the ground, dying, and producing fruit. Now Mary understood that this was not just general teaching intended for the masses but was the eternal truth that impacted her.

Mary understood and experienced **the Master**. Jesus had become more than a great teacher and miracle worker who cast seven demons from her. Jesus was more to her than a great leader and personal friend. She understood that Jesus had purchased her eternal life with His blood and validated the purchase by His resurrection. She understood because *He had said these things to her*.

Because Mary experienced Jesus as her Master, she came and announced the good news that He is risen. The Greek word is the same root for angel. Angels are divine, faithful servants who God created to, among other things, deliver His messages. The Bible gives several examples of these divine beings faithfully delivering God’s messages to humans.

This story brings up three important questions we each should answer. First, “Have you come face-to-face with the resurrected Jesus?” Most people are too busy living life and accomplishing their desired goals to give much thought to Jesus. Maybe on Easter some

folks might entertain the notion that Jesus of Nazareth died and rose from the tomb. But, for the most part, people have their intellect, will, and emotions fixed on mundane, earthly matters. The passing stuff is all that matters. We need to come to grips with the reality that Jesus is the Lamb of God who was chosen in eternity to pay for the sins of the world with His own sacrifice. We will not come to grips with that reality until we realize we have a need in our own lives for a redemption price for our sins. We will not come to grips with our own sin until we really understand that Jesus the Savior is also Jesus the Eternal Judge.

A second question is, “Does the experience with the Master cause you to go and announce the “Good News”? If our salvation, the release of our sins so that we are reconciled with our Creator, is real to us, wouldn’t we desire others to know how they can be reconciled with God? There is great danger in thinking that all we need to do is admit sin, say a simple prayer, and then go through the rest of life assuming we are okay with the Master. A real face-to-face meeting with the Master changes our very person and character. Paul wrote, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17)*. New creations are distinct from old creations. When the old is passed away, we experience such joy and such release that we truly like to discuss the matter with others.

A final question is, “What does your love for the gospel, or unconcern for the gospel, say about your meeting with Jesus?” What is our answer?