

From Sorrow to Hope John 20:1-18

INTRODUCTION

A lot can happen in a few days...**right?** What a difference one week can make! You doubt it?! Well, the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that point. Please turn in your Bible to **John 20:1-18**. The biblical account of Mary Magdalene meeting Jesus at the empty tomb is found only in John's gospel. I think Mary must have told John about it personally. **Everything about this little slice of life rings true to human nature as we know it.** A weeping woman lingers by an empty tomb, wondering what has happened to the body of the One she loved. When Jesus suddenly appears, she doesn't recognize Him. Then she grips His feet so tightly that He has to tell her to let go. **The encounter ends with the mourner turned into a missionary, running to tell the others what she has just seen and heard.**

Please take note of...

I. A woman and her _____ (20:11-15)

To better understand what's before us let us...

A. Remember the _____ (John 20:1-10)

The background of the story is in **verses 1-10**. Mary had been to the tomb and discovered that the stone was taken away. She ran to Peter and John and excitedly reported (**John 20:2**), *"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."* Peter and John immediately ran to the tomb. John got there first, but just looked in. Peter entered the tomb and discovered the grave clothes without Jesus' body. Then John went in, saw, and believed that Jesus was risen (**John 20:8**). But Peter went away still pondering (marveling at) what had happened (**Luke 24:12**). But neither man understood yet from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead (**John 20:9**). After viewing the empty tomb, both men returned home.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene had arrived and she remained by the tomb, weeping. She wanted to find Jesus, although at this point she was just trying to find His corpse. In her thinking, someone had added insult to injury by robbing the grave.

That's the context...next, please...

B. Feel her _____

Can you pause long enough to feel with Mary? This whole paragraph is overflowing with her sorrow and love. She had come back to the tomb, after taking her message to Peter and John. Then, she must have been left behind in their race to the tomb, so that, by the time she got there again, they were gone. So, she stands there alone, weeping, or literally, sobbing. The Jewish Talmud says; *"The deeper the sorrow, the less the tongue has to say."* She was so overwhelmed with grief that she was not even startled by the presence of angels and she did not recognize Jesus, as she said, *"Just tell me where my Lord is . . . please."* Jesus first responded to Mary, in **verse 15**, by calling her, *"woman"*. But, there's a second important question that the risen Lord asks Mary (**John 20:15**): *"Whom are you seeking?"* He asks it even before she has a chance to answer the first question *because the answer to why she is weeping is found in the answer of whom she is seeking.* Note the question Jesus asked: *"Who are you looking for?"* Not *"What are you looking for?"* That's a different question. Mary was looking for a what? A dead body. She was looking for something; Jesus pointed her to someone. The answer to our deepest needs is not something, but someone, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary's distress will lead to a remarkable discovery; distress and despair become delight. After she asked this question and apparently after not receiving an immediate answer she again turned to look into Christ's tomb. And then what happened?

Please note...

II. A woman and her _____ (20:16-18)

Please note that Mary hears the voice of Jesus; she hears her name spoken in the familiar (most probably in Aramaic - Miriam) endearing voice of her Savior. **Mary hears and recognizes His voice before she sees His face!** We know the Lord by His voice. We sense the Holy Spirit and we sense His presence.

Mary calls Jesus "*Rabboni*" or My Master; not simply Rabbi (master or teacher). **The title is of course intimate and respectful.** Mary acknowledges Jesus as both Lord and Master and she her humble servant. Mary's sorrow has been transformed to surprise and joy.

Then he says, "*Do not touch me,*" or better, "*Stop clinging to me.*" Perhaps she knelt down and wrapped her arms around his feet so that he would never leave: "*I thought I had lost you, but now that I have you back again, I'm never going to let you go.*" In Jesus, Mary had found a man she could love and trust. **But she was clinging to that which she must give up.** Her clinging meant, "*I think everything is the same as it used to be.*" The words of Jesus mean something like, "*No, many things are different now.*" Very gently Jesus begins to unfold the future before her eyes. He will soon ascend to the Father where He will take His place at the right hand of the Majesty on high. **From there He will intercede for His followers and will commune with them through the Holy Spirit.** He will be closer to them in the future than He has been in the past. If He stays on the earth, His ministry will be limited to the few who see Him face to face. He must ascend or we will not be saved. He must leave the few so He can save the many, which includes all of us who follow Him today. On that day Mary could touch Him. Once ascended, we can all "*touch Him*" through faith and prayer and worship.

CONCLUSION

What can we take with us this morning? I think a careful look at Mary's experience at the empty tomb will not only give you further information, it will also give you insight for daily living.

- **God chooses to use _____ people**

God could use you in ways you would not expect. In fact, I would contend that He is using you in ways you don't expect or realize. **God could use that person you have "written off" in an unexpected way as well.** If God doesn't write anyone off, neither should we. Since God is doing such things with your life, we should live life with humility. What happens in our life that has eternal significance is not because of what we do; it is because of what God is doing through us. **Our boasting should not be in our significance but in His grace.**

- **We see that most _____ in life is foolish**

We read that Mary was at the tomb crying. She was distraught because the body of Jesus was missing. Perhaps we could even say she was "beside herself". She looks in the tomb and saw two angels. The angels ask, "*Why are you crying?*" She responds that she is crying because the body of Jesus is missing. Now we ask can't help wondering why the presence of the angels didn't tip her off to the fact that Jesus had risen. **But that's the way life is sometimes, we miss the obvious because we are so wrapped up in our own misery.**

- **Joy increases as we see Jesus more _____**

Mary was in the presence of Jesus but did not know joy. She didn't know joy because she didn't see Him. Even when Mary was talking directly to Him she did not know joy at first because she did not recognize Him. Now, we ask, "*how could that be?*" *How could she look at him but not see Him?*

What I want you to see is this: Mary's joy did not come until she saw Jesus clearly. She was in His presence but still miserable. She looked right at Him and continued to cry. But when she saw Him clearly, the clouds gave way to the radiance of joy. The same is true for us.

We look in the wrong places for joy. We look to worldly "stuff" (if I could have this thing, live in this place, have this job, etc.). We look to other people to make us happy (a spouse, a parent, a friend, an entertainer). We look to favorable circumstances (winning the lottery, getting a promotion, sunshine). These things might make life more pleasant but their "joy" (if you can call it that) is superficial and temporary.

The truth however is that joy is not found in us; it is found in Him. **Joy is not something we produce; it is something that accompanies relationship.** Our life is the life He gives us. Our goal needs to be to know Him better. We should pray not to get through our list, but to cultivate a relationship with our Lord. We read His Word not to master a body of information, but because we want to know Him better. We obey not to earn His favor but to do what is pleasing to Him. In the times of crisis we must learn to turn not to our inner resolve but to His perfect wisdom and strength. This is where joy is found.

- **Those who see clearly are to tell _____**

Jesus exhorts Mary to stop clinging and start spreading the good news. How like Mary we are. We claim Christ as our Savior and Lord and we join a church. We change many of our activities to church related pursuits (not altogether bad). We like to "huddle together" as much as possible. The fellowship is unlike anything we have ever known. We write our own music. We publish our own phone book. We vow to patronize those we like to huddle with. We develop our own lingo. We form political lobbying forces. We look with suspicion over the wall we have built at everyone outside the wall. Let me ask you . . . what are we doing? We're clinging.

Jesus makes the same point to us: stop clinging and go and tell others. We will have an eternity for exclusive fellowship. Don't get me wrong: we need the times of fellowship. We need each other. But we must not isolate. We must guard against the tendency to hold on so tight that we never leave the safety of the group. We can enjoy the "holy huddle" so much that we keep others away rather than share with them the good news of the gospel.