

THE RISEN CHRIST

John 20:1-31

Key Verse: 20:17b

“Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

St. Paul said that Christians are to be pitied the most if Jesus was not raised from the dead. It would be better for us to eat and drink for our life would end with death. Today’s passage tells us about the resurrection of Jesus. Death seems so final and resurrection sounds unrealistic. But the fact is that our God raised Jesus from the dead. The Risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene and his disciples to give them a new direction in life. May God help us accept resurrection as a fact and hear the words of Christ for each of us!

I. THE EMPTY TOMB (1-9)

Look at verses 1-2. It was the first Sunday morning after Jesus had died on the cross, taking away the sin of the world. While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus. The other gospels tell us that several other women went with her (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:10). John’s account is focused on Mary Magdalene. Who was Mary Magdalene? According to Luke 8:2, Jesus freed her from the seven demons. Before she met Jesus, Mary must have lived a sinful life, following her physical desires. Without God to protect her, demons came into her and tormented her day and night. But Jesus set her free from the demons and gave her a new life. Since then, she loved Jesus more than anything or anyone in the world. She devoted her life to Jesus and his ministry. She traveled with him, serving the ministry behind the scene. She followed Jesus to Jerusalem and stood under the cross and witnessed his crucifixion. She also watched the burial of Jesus’ body (19:25,40-42; Lk 23:55). After his burial she went home and cried all night, questioning why such a good man had to be condemned and crucified.

The next day, early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, she went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices. She wanted to express her love for Jesus for the last time. As she climbed the hill, she was concerned about the huge stone that had been placed at the tomb’s entrance, and about the soldiers who were guarding the tomb.

When she got to the tomb, however, she saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. Something was terribly wrong. The tomb was empty. Jesus’ body was not there. Someone had taken away his body. So she came running to Peter and John, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” (2) Peter and John could not believe what she told them. So they immediately started for the tomb. They ran. John, who was younger than Peter, outran him in this race, and reached the tomb first. But he was hesitant to go in. He just looked in, and went no further. Then Peter arrived. He looked in and went inside the tomb to examine the scene carefully. He saw the strips of linen lying there as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head.

The author John stresses the fact that the cloth was lying there in its place, separate from the linen (7). The grave cloth was not torn. It was not forcibly taken off from the body. It was lying there as if the body of Jesus had simply slipped out of them. In the police lingo, there was no sign of struggle. It was no crime scene. What they saw puzzled them. The sight made an impression in John's heart. He knew that Mary's initial assessment that someone took the body was wrong. There was no foul play. Verse 8 says that he saw and believed. He believed what Mary had told him--that the tomb was empty. This was an undeniable fact.

The empty tomb was bad news to Mary. Some people today also think that this is unfortunate for Christians. To pay homage to famous people, they usually visit their tombs. They say that it's pity for Christians because we go to Jerusalem only to see the empty tomb. They have no idea how happy we are to know that the tomb is empty!

The disciples saw that the tomb was empty. But they had no resurrection faith at that time. They did not make a connection between the empty tomb and his resurrection. They did not remember Jesus' words that he would rise on the third day. They went home, scratching their heads. But the fact was that the tomb was empty and the morning sunshine was beginning to shine on the dark inside of the empty tomb. Yet the two disciples' hearts were still weighed down. Why? Verse 9 says in parenthesis, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."

II. JESUS APPEARS TO MARY MAGDALENE (10-17)

Then the disciples went back home, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. She was sad because she could not say the final goodbye to her beloved Lord. As she bent over to look into the tomb, she saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. *They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him"* (13). At this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not recognize him (14). *He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."* (15).

Because of her love for Jesus, Mary Magdalene was blessed to be the first person to see the Risen Christ. However, she could not recognize Jesus (14). Her tears obstructed her vision. Also the Risen Christ looked different. He was no longer a suffering servant she used to see. Still, the main reason why she didn't recognize him was that she wasn't expecting him to come alive. Like the disciples, she did not remember Jesus' promise about his resurrection. Her heart was filled with sorrow and her eyes with tears. She loved Jesus so much because Jesus had loved her so much. She had been tormented by demons. The demons had made her look ugly. No one wanted to hang out with her. But Jesus loved her. He healed her with his loving touch. Now her demons were gone, and her sins were forgiven; but her sorrow problem remained, because she had not yet met the Risen Christ.

Many people today are also sorrowful, mainly because they don't know the Savior personally. Without Jesus, all people are under the power of sin and death. They cannot but become fatalistic, because graveyard and eternal condemnation await them after their hard life in this world. So they turn their attention to instant gratification of their sinful nature. They would say, "Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1Co 15:32). Mary Magdalene received much love from Jesus. But she was crying, because she had not yet believed in the glorious resurrection of Christ.

Look at verse 15 again. *He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"* When Jesus asked her, "Why are you crying?" he meant, "You don't have to cry for me. Look at me. I have risen and I still love you!" Mary's affection for Jesus was beautiful. But her human affection blinded her spiritual eyes. She couldn't see the Risen Lord standing in front of her. Likewise, we often become spiritually blind when we are preoccupied with sorrow or other human feelings. It is better for us to remember God's word than to cry. May God help us remember his word and look up the Risen Christ rather than look for Jesus in the wrong place!

Look at verse 16. *Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").* Jesus called her by name. When he said, "Mary," she realized that it was Jesus, and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" Mary was so happy that she wanted to hold on to Jesus forever. However, Jesus had something to tell her. Look at verse 17. *Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* Mary wanted to cling to Jesus and spend time with him forever. As long as she was with Jesus, she was happy. But Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father..." The Risen Christ wanted to have a spiritual relationship with her through the Holy Spirit (14:16-20).

Then Jesus told her, "Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Jesus helped her to overcome her emotions and carry out her mission. Jesus asked her to tell the good news to the brothers that he was not in the grave, but rose from the dead. Jesus asked her to proclaim the good news that Jesus was returning to God to sit at the right hand of God as the Sovereign Ruler and Judge (Rev 11:15). Jesus did not help Mary with human sympathy. Instead, he gave her a mission. The love of Jesus was to help her to live a life of mission.

Look at verse 18. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" When she shouted, "I have seen the Lord!" the disciples' eyes popped out. She told them everything the Risen Christ had told her.

III. JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES (19-31)

What were the disciples doing when the news of Jesus' resurrection reached them? They were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews (19). Peter had been bold to say, "I will lay down my life for you" (13:37). Now, however, he was full of fear,

and so were the other disciples. They were gripped with the fear of death because they had not met the Risen Christ.

Look at verse 19. *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* This was more than an ordinary greeting. Jesus blessed them with the peace of God, the peace that only God can give. In this world there is no real peace. The world is full of anxiety because of the power of Satan. So some young people try to escape from these realities of life somehow by indulging in mind-numbing things like drugs, alcohol, and other things. The problem is that they can find no lasting peace in these things.

When the disciples saw the Risen Christ, the fear of death vanished from their hearts. When they heard the voice of the Lord, "Peace be with you," the peace of God was overflowing in their hearts. The voice of the Risen Christ dispelled fear from their hearts and replaced it with peace. Look at verse 20. *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* Likewise, we can overcome all kinds of fear and anxiety when we hear the voice of Jesus.

What did Jesus do for his disciples next? He commissioned them as missionaries. Look at verse 21. *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* The faith of Jesus is amazing. His disciples had been so fearful that they couldn't even open the door. Yet, Jesus appointed them to be missionaries to carry the gospel to the world. When we remember John 3:16, we can understand why Jesus gave them this commission. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God sent his Son as a missionary to save the sinful world. The Risen Christ also sent his disciples into the world. He sent them to spread the good news of salvation to the perishing. Jesus helped them overcome their human situations and become men of mission. The Bible teaches us that we were created for a mission: to do God's work (Ge 1:28; Eph 2:10). But when man was cursed because of his sin, this mission was replaced by his struggle for three meals a day. Human beings spend half of their lifetime to earn their bread and pay their bills. But the Risen Christ restored the original mission when he told them, "I am sending you."

How did Jesus equip his disciples for the mission? Jesus did not teach them psychology 101, nor did he give them taekwondo training. What did he give them? Look at verse 22. *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* With our human ability, we can achieve very little in the work of God. God's work is different from the worldly business. Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against Satan (Eph 6:12). We really need the help of the Holy Spirit to carry out our mission.

Look at verse 23. *"If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* Only God can forgive sins but Jesus has given us the privilege to proclaim forgiveness of sins. The main point of this verse is that disciples must proclaim the forgiveness of sins through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We must share this message with others so that their sins may be

forgiven. We cannot neglect this mission, because sin is not a way to human freedom, but to eternal condemnation. Sin is the most serious problem facing mankind, much more serious than climate change or World War III. And we can proclaim the forgiveness of sins only after we ourselves repent our sins and receive forgiveness from the Risen Christ.

Doubting is another spiritual problem of man. Now Thomas was not with the disciples when the Risen Christ appeared to them. When the other disciples told him about the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” Thomas was a very logical person. The problem was that he trusted his logic more than God’s word. He insisted on a scientific explanation about Jesus’ resurrection, rather than remembering the promise of Jesus concerning his resurrection.

Look at verses 26-27. *A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”* The Risen Lord allowed Thomas to touch his nail marks and believe in his resurrection. The Risen Lord had pity on this skeptical man who had no peace because of his unbelief. Jesus even allowed him to touch his scars. In this way, he helped Thomas solve his spiritual problem. At this, Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas’ eyes and heart were opened as he saw the wounded hands and side of Jesus. He finally believed that Jesus was alive. At the moment, Thomas made a leap of faith. He made a confession of faith, “My Lord and my God!” He confessed Jesus as his personal Savior who saved him from his sins.

Let us read verse 29 together. *Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* Thomas was blessed because he had seen the Risen Jesus and believed. After he had seen the Risen Jesus, he could understand the meaning of his death and resurrection as well as the promise of his kingdom. But Jesus added, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” This is his promise for all of us who have not seen Jesus with our eyes. Thomas did not believe based on what Jesus said, but on what he saw. But those who believe based on his words of promise are more blessed, because they can enter the realm of faith directly, not through their five senses. By faith in God’s words, we can see the Risen Lord with our spiritual eyes. We can experience the joy of the kingdom of God in our hearts.

Look at verse 30. The reason Jesus did many signs in the presence of his disciples was to open their spiritual eyes to see the meaning of his death and the hope of his glorious resurrection. John says in verse 31: *“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* John’s gospel was written to help us to believe in Jesus and have eternal life.

In conclusion, the tomb of Jesus was empty. The Risen Christ appeared to Mary and his disciples. He gave them peace. He told them to receive the Holy Spirit. Then he

gave them a mission to go and tell the good news of forgiveness. The Risen Christ wants all of us to live a life of faith and mission. He says: "*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" As we look forward to our own resurrection, may God help us to share the good news of Jesus with young people of our time!