

## The Moment the Power of the Resurrection Becomes Personal

John 20:1-18

Let us pray: Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, the bread of our life, and the medicine that heals us wholly. Thank you, Lord. In our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.

Today is Easter. Every sacred feast, including every feast in the Bible, is connected to the act of remembrance. In Greek, that word is *anamnesis*. You might recognize the root: it's related to the word *amnesia*. But *anamnesis* is more than just remembering something. It means calling something to mind with purpose, actively bringing the past into the present, and participating in what is being remembered. That's why Christian and Jewish feasts are more than memorials. They are opportunities to experience again, right now, the saving events of the past. I bless you this Easter that you would experience the resurrection life and power of the Lord within you today.

A few days ago, we gathered for Maundy Thursday worship. That was the night Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples. The Passover tradition, which Jewish people continue to observe to this day, holds spiritual meanings within it that even they don't realize.

At the Passover meal, they eat a flatbread called *matzah*, unleavened bread. Three pieces of *matzah* are placed inside a special pouch. The pouch has three separate compartments, one for each piece. Three in one. That unity is the symbol. Jewish tradition interprets this as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, one people, one bloodline. But for us, it's hard to miss what it really points to: the Trinity.

The middle piece of *matzah* is taken out and broken in two. What does that mean from a Christian perspective? The second person of the Godhead stepped forward, and his body was broken. That's the cross. The larger of the two broken pieces is called the *afikoman*. It's wrapped in white linen and hidden away. This represents Jesus wrapped in burial cloth and laid in the tomb. Then the children search for it. It's a game. When the *afikoman* is found, it's shared among everyone as the final food of the meal. The child who finds it receives a prize. And then, they're told to wait until Shavuot, that is, Pentecost, where an even greater gift is given. It points to the gift Jesus gave at Pentecost: the Holy Spirit.

As for the first prize, the one given to the child who finds the *afikoman*, I think it may represent the gift of understanding the Old Testament Scriptures, the Torah, the Word of God. And that, I believe, connects directly to our passage today.

Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and John, all three of them in today's passage, are in much the same position as Jewish people who observe the Passover feast without understanding its true

spiritual meaning. They had read and studied the Scriptures extensively, but they did not yet understand them. Verse 9 tells us: "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." They had heard the words, but the meaning had not broken through. The reason is simple: the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out on them. As Jesus promised in John 14:26, the Holy Spirit would be the one to teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus had said.

These two disciples had studied the Scriptures deeply and had been taught directly by Jesus himself. And yet, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come, they looked into the empty tomb and still did not grasp the resurrection. They simply went home.

Mary Magdalene was in the same place. She had a deeply personal faith. She had been freed by Jesus from seven demons. She had followed him closely, served him, and sat under his teaching. But the Holy Spirit had not yet come to her either. The text tells us she stood outside weeping, assuming that someone had stolen Jesus' body. And the word used in the original language is not a quiet sobbing. It means loud, uncontrollable wailing.

We can be earnest and devoted, just like these three, and yet if we do not truly know the Scriptures and do not have the Holy Spirit, coming to church can start to feel like what Mary was doing: coming to anoint a dead body. The empty tomb is right in front of us as evidence of the resurrection, but we don't see it for what it is. We don't come expecting to meet the living Lord. And so, like Mary, we end up in grief and discouragement. Or, like Peter and John, we may have heard the resurrection proclaimed before, but it has no real connection to our lives. In some cases, a person may have sat in church long enough to believe intellectually that Jesus rose from the dead, and yet feel that his resurrection has no relevance for them personally.

But there is always hope in the Word of God. Mary Magdalene eventually meets the risen Lord. So do Peter, John, and the other disciples.

Mary did not fully understand the Scriptures, but her love for Jesus ran deep. God the Father knew she would come to the tomb at the break of dawn, and he had prepared two angels there ahead of her arrival. She still understood nothing, yet she could not bring herself to leave the place where Jesus had been buried. She stayed, weeping loudly, desperate somehow to find him.

Then something made her look into the tomb. Perhaps she felt something. Inside, two angels were seated where Jesus' body had been. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" This was not a question asked out of ignorance. It was more like: the Lord has risen, so why are you still weeping? But Mary remained locked inside her own thoughts. She saw the angels and

heard their words, and still did not understand. This can happen to us too when we hear the Word.

When we open the Scriptures, when the Word is proclaimed, we too can encounter these two angels. The Word itself is like those two angels, bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

Mary answered them through her sobs. She told them she didn't know where they had taken her Lord, that she needed to find and care for him.

Then, as she said this, she sensed someone behind her and turned around. Jesus was standing there, but she did not recognize him. Why not? Because his appearance had changed. He had entered into a new creation, no longer the same form of the old creation but now a resurrection body. That is why he had passed right through the burial linens without unwrapping them, just as he would later pass through the walls of the locked room where the disciples were hiding. If he could pass through walls, why was the stone rolled away from the tomb at all? It wasn't for Jesus. It was so the disciples could see that the tomb was empty.

Jesus asked Mary the same question the angels had asked: "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" She assumed he was the gardener. Still weeping, she told him that if he was the one who had taken the body, she would go and get it herself, if only he would tell her where it was.

What happened next is one of the most breathtaking moments in the entire resurrection story. Jesus spoke one word: "Mary." Just her name. And everything shifted. A stranger would not have known her name. She recognized him immediately and cried out, "Rabboni!", meaning "Teacher." The reason she knew it was Jesus was not because of the way he looked. It was the sound of his voice. She had heard it countless times before, and she recognized it.

We should become familiar with the Lord's voice in ordinary life. Making it a daily habit to read and meditate on the Word aloud is how that happens. Then, you will be able to hear his intimate call even in moments of loss and despair. Sound carries that kind of power. We know from science that an unborn child can begin hearing the voices of its parents as early as five months in the womb. After birth, a baby's eyesight develops slowly, but hearing is nearly fully formed from the very first day. What we hear shapes us, spiritually as much as physically.

There is a hidden wisdom in the way Jewish people have always read Scripture. They read it aloud, chant it, and memorize it by speaking it. We have not only the Scripture but the Holy Spirit. When we place the promises of the Word on our lips, when we keep it before our eyes and let ourselves grow familiar with it, the Lord's voice begins to be heard through the Holy Spirit.

When we hear the voice of the risen Lord, new hope and vision are born in us. Our whole perspective on life and direction changes. Mary heard Jesus speak of his ascension, which was the fulfillment of the messianic promises the Scriptures had foretold, and she was commissioned to go and bring that news to the disciples. She was the first witness to the resurrection and the first apostle of the Lord's risen word.

And notice how Jesus refers to the disciples: he calls them "my brothers," and he speaks of God as "my Father and your Father." In doing so, he is declaring that in the new creation, they have become his brothers and sisters. Mary is included in this, too. The tomb, that place of loss and despair, has become the place of resurrection, the place of new birth into the family of God, and the place of a new commission.

The empty tomb is evidence that heaven's power has broken through every limitation the enemy has placed on humanity. Resurrection life and power have already been released to us who have become brothers and sisters of the Lord.

We talked earlier about anamnesis. Both the Lord's Supper and the practice of reading Scripture aloud, what the Hebrew tradition calls *hagah*, are not simply ways of remembering what God accomplished in the past. They are ways of reconnecting to those events and bringing them into the present. This means the resurrection is not a past event locked in history. It is a reality that can be experienced in your life today.

Jesus has already paid the price for the full restoration of every part of us: body, mind, soul, and finances, every dimension of our lives. So, beloved, every time you take communion and every time you meditate on the Word aloud, believe that the power of the cross and the resurrection is yours to receive today. As Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, without faith it is impossible to please God.

Our merciful Father, who knows how slow we are to believe, will send two angels, show up himself in the place of despair, and call us by name. He will send a Mary Magdalene to encourage our faith. Seek the Lord with the love you have for him. Even if you do not recognize him, he will call your name first. The moment you hear that voice, the resurrection power of God will become personal to you, just as it did for Mary, and he will bring resurrection to the places in your life that need it most. Amen.

Let us pray: Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, thank you for giving us resurrection life and power through your cross and resurrection. When you call our names, help us hear and recognize your voice, and restore in us a faith that bears witness to your living presence. Work in us, that through daily declarations of faith, we may fully experience the power of your resurrection. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we love. Amen.