

John 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because 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.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her (NRSV).

Today's message is about one of the most significant Bible events ever – seeing the resurrected Lord. It would be exciting to see the Lord physically with your very own eyes, knowing that Jesus, the Son of God, is alive and well. I am sure you are familiar with the book "Ripley's Believe It or Not." Robert Ripley enjoyed collecting interesting bits of information that seemed unbelievable. He was first published newspaper cartoons, then a book, radio, and TV. Did you know that the world's largest hot dog is 3000 feet long and weighs 885 pounds? Well, believe it or not, that's a lot of baloney!

One fact that has been proven true is that Jesus rose from the grave. The opponents of Jesus could never discredit his divine status. They could not produce any evidence at all that he did not raise from the dead. Whereas the post resurrection appearances of Jesus stand as evidence that he did rise from the grave. One good example is the Apostle Paul. He simply would not have traded the successful career life he was living in order to go through all of the trials and tribulations that he endured if he did not encounter the post resurrected Jesus. Thomas gets a bad rap and is known throughout history as a doubter. However, when he saw the post resurrected Jesus it changed his perspective entirely. We are fortunate we believe without having to see it. Jesus said "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29).

When we see something that surprises us, sometimes we say "I don't believe it." I was in Taco Bell many years ago and this lady stopped right in front of me and stared at me. She just stood there right in front of me staring at me for the longest time with a strangest look on her face and said "I don't believe it." It was funny and so unusual that others stopped to see what was going on. Then I recognized her. It was someone that I had worked with over 10 years earlier. We both aged a little, our appearance changed just a little, but I did not recognize her out of our work environment. Well, that kind of "I don't believe it" moment is just a happy expression.

In our Scripture for today, this is a serious "believe it or not" moment for Mary Magdalene. We all know what happened. Jesus announced several times that he was going to die and be resurrected. You know the story. He was crucified on the cross,

buried in a tomb, and early Sunday morning Mary Magdalene went to the tomb but the body is gone. She had an encounter with angels and then she saw the resurrected Jesus. John is very clear – they still did not understand that Jesus had to rise. They simply did not get it because of all of the confusion that comes with trauma.

It is obvious that they did not make up the story. Sealing the tomb confirms it. The fact that it is hard to believe confirms it. If the gospel writers were trying to gain approval, they would omit things that are hard to believe. The opponents of Jesus also confirm that he has risen due to their inability to produce evidence of the dichotomy. Whenever there is a dispute, you produce the evidence that shows your perspective. Notice what happens next. The disciples went back to their homes. I find that very interesting. Jesus said go and make disciples but they go back home. Jesus set them up to build the church and they go back home. But Mary, now that's another story. Mary is there. She is the first to see Jesus because she is there. This is one of the most amazing events ever. The disciples missed it because they went home. Whereas, Mary sees the Lord because she is there.

Now take a moment and imagine you are there. You are also down and out, depressed, and so sad. Your leader has been killed. You are confused; one of your own has betrayed your leader. It all happened so fast your mind can't process all the details. Your heart struggles with all of the pain. You never saw, felt, or experienced, anything like this before. You are in shock. It seems so unreal. You don't know what to do. You discover the tomb is empty. Are you happy, sad, or confused? Do you even notice that the stone is rolled away? Do you wonder about the linen? A grave robber would not have taken the time to fold them. Do you wonder why the disciples aren't there? Are you scared? You saw Jesus brutalized. Are you thinking maybe me too? What do you think, feel, say, or do?

Now think this through for a minute. There are a lot of people that believe in Jesus: the Disciples, the women, the secret followers, Lazarus and his family, many people have been healed, but only Mary races to the tomb the first thing in the morning. Mary is there at the tomb. Her loved one has died! And then bam! Oh my, there he is! When she sees him it is intense. Mary is in a very unique position. Now she can't help but spread the Good News! Now she is full of excitement. She is an eye witness to the most amazing thing ever and proclaims "I have seen the Lord."

This is the very essence of Christianity. We believe while the world is in darkness. We are all in darkness until we have seen the Lord. Live your life focused on living by the life and the word of Jesus.