

**JESUS: “Celebration of Life”**  
**John 20: 1-18**

- 1** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,  
Mary Magdalene went to the tomb  
and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.
- 2** So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said,  
“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”
- 3** So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
- 4** Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
- 5** He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.
- 6** Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb.  
He saw the strips of linen lying there,
- 7** as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head.  
The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.
- 8** Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.  
He saw and believed.
- 9** (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)
- 10** Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.
- 11** Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.  
As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb
- 12** and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been,  
one at the head and the other at the foot.
- 13** 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.”
- 14** At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there,  
but she did not realize that it was Jesus.
- 15** 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.”
- 16** Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic,  
“Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).
- 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.’ ”
- 18** Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!”  
And she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Introduction**

On Friday, Jesus was put to death for sedition and treason as far as the Roman authorities were concerned. He was crucified for blasphemy as far as the religious authorities were concerned. Jesus must have posed a real threat to their position and power,

their control over the people and their way of life. So, they got rid of him. At least, they thought they had!

By Saturday, his followers had scattered, in hiding for fear that the same thing could happen to them. With even more incentive to keep holy the Sabbath, the disciples stayed away from the garden tomb.

On early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, while still dark, it was the women who ventured out to the grave site to mourn the death of their rabbi and friend. The Roman guards were still there making sure that this Messiah/King of the Jews stayed in the tomb. The huge boulder that covered the entrance was still in place and it was sealed in a way that even several strong men would have to work long and hard to remove it.

The upstart, uprising, emerging Jesus movement was stopped dead in its tracks. Both Pilate and Caiphas had done their jobs. Their control over the people could now resume...

No! That's not exactly what happened!

### **I. The Empty Tomb (vs. 1-8)**

Mary Magdalene and the women arrived and not only were the guards gone, but the stone had been rolled away. They ran back to get Peter and John and the others. Remember, for any adult, to run was undignified. With utter despair and grief, Mary cried, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Can you imagine the scene? Confusion - what in the world is going on. Worry - did someone steal Jesus' body? Doubt - believe a woman's witness? Panic - we better get there and find out.

Peter and John went running (I mean, running) and found the tomb not only open but empty. Later on, John himself writes that "they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."

Cautious doubt and outright unbelief still swirl around the historical event or religious belief in the resurrection of Jesus. *Newsweek* magazine, the *History Channel*, and just about every religious studies department in our colleges and universities give every confidence to the human analysis that the early followers of Jesus made up this story to somehow bolster their faith and commitment to this charismatic teacher and preacher.

But the naturalistic explanation for the Christian faith is sorely wanting. Any historian worth their salt will say that something quite significant must have happened to turn this band of frightened, disorganized, scattered, hopeless disciples into people overwhelmed with joy; bold enough to proclaim the resurrection even to the point of dying for Christ; how they and succeeding generations were able to convey their resurrection faith in a way that extends down the centuries. What is it that happened?

The best plausible reason is that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. The Bible goes on to tell the story.

## **II. Meeting the Risen Lord (vs. 10-17)**

The disciples went back a bit confused. Peter wondered to himself what had happened. In Luke 24 it says how “Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” After seeing the empty tomb, John now believed the women’s account of Jesus’ body missing from the tomb. They wanted to find out what happened. Perhaps those who put him to death would act out further indignities. Even though the burial clothes were perfectly in place as if the body just vanished, Peter and John still went away quite perplexed.

But Mary stayed. She stood outside the tomb, weeping. When she had the strength to look in, it says she saw angels in dazzling white. They asked her, “Why are you crying?” She told of her hopeless and fearful feelings.

She turned around now looking outside, away from the tomb and saw Jesus. Not recognizing him either through her tears or in the early dawn, who would have thought? Jesus simply said her name, “Mary.” She turned again toward him and cried out with an almost disbelieving belief, “Rabbi/Teacher.” Imagine the love that flooded her heart when she heard her Savior saying her name!

John records for us important meanings from the many conversations he and Mary Magdalene must have had in the days to come. After all he and this Mary along with Jesus’ mother were the only ones to follow him to the cross and witness up close the severity of his passion and death. They were eye witnesses. They alone heard the last words from the cross that hold so much meaning for followers of Jesus. “Father, forgive them... It is finished... Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

You see, as long as Mary kept her eyes on the tomb, the reality of death and grief remained. It was when she turned toward the Risen Lord that the reality of resurrection and the hope God holds for us took hold of her. The same is true for us. No one will recognize Jesus when insisting on looking in the wrong direction. When you find yourself fixed on the grief of the grave, the Lord wants you to wrench your eyes away. When you turn and look toward the Risen Christ, he'll speak your name and you'll know that he's alive. This is the moment when Jesus and all of heaven celebrated.

In one of Jesus' parables, the shepherd calls out, "Come, celebrate with me. Rejoice with me. I've found my lost sheep." The Risen Lord is so very near to you and me this morning, and he's calling your name and mine. So, turn away from the grave and turn to the living Savior. Jesus is celebrating. For the Bible says there is great joy in heaven when you hear your name as you turn to Jesus.

### **III. The Simple, Profound Good News (vs. 18)**

Then "Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord.' And she told them the things Jesus said to her." Like the man who found his lost sheep, like the woman who found her misplaced coin, like the Father whose prodigal son came home (all in Luke 15), Mary was filled with joy. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" she'd already heard. "He is not here; he has risen!" Now after hearing her name and seeing Jesus alive, what else could she do but to go and tell the good news?

What newly, first time, pregnant couple can't wait to tell their parents and friends? Getting that promotion or exciting new job begs to tell someone. Cancer free after weeks or months of treatment is good news to share with praise and thanks abounding. When meeting Jesus Christ by faith, experiencing and knowing God's forgiveness and the joy of a new life, who wouldn't want to go and tell it? It's the greatest news you'll ever have to share. This is eternal good news.

Yes, the story has been around for centuries now. The Christian faith is one of the world's top religions. Perhaps you've seen many Easter Sundays come and go. It may be easy to hear the story again and just shrug it off. But if you've heard Jesus say your name, if you've accepted Jesus into your life as your gracious, giving and forgiving Lord, if you know the abiding joy of eternal life in Christ, then you know both the delight and urgency of telling others.

## **Conclusion**

This past week I thought, “How can I prepare and preach another Easter message? Isn’t there a new way to *wow* the Easter crowd?” But I soon realized that I don’t to embellish, explain, defend, or complicate the story. Just declare it.

In Matthew 16, Jesus had said that he had to “suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day.” Then he was betrayed, arrested, tried, abandoned, forsaken, beaten and crucified. From the cross he was heard saying, “It is finished!”

The religious and Roman authorities had the tomb secured by a huge stone. They sealed the tomb and assigned guards to keep watch at the site. Guarded and sealed, the tomb was silent, untouched, unseen until the early hours of the first Easter day.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all give an account of the miraculous events of that day. Jesus rose up from being dead. He is alive. An angel from heaven rolled away the stone. Jesus appeared to Mary and the other women with her. Then to Peter and John and all the disciples. He spent the next forty days with his followers. It says that the risen Jesus was seen by as many as 500 of them at one time.

So, if you’re among those who believe in God’s miracles, if you find hope in Christ’s resurrection, if you thrill at the sound of your name known and spoken by your Savior, then say so! “Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.” Alleluia!