

The Only Way Forward
John 20:10-18/#thegospelofjohn

In John 20, Mary Magdalene is weeping bitterly at the tomb of Jesus. Maybe this year you have cried bitterly as well. Maybe people you deeply love have spent most of 2018 in tears. Like Mary, you may be standing in despair asking what happened.

Jesus had delivered Mary from years of demonic oppression (Luke 8:2, Mark 16:9) and it was as if a thousand years of chains were cut away and the deepest stains of her life were made clean, and now her Savior was dead. Mary is with Jesus when all His disciples had fled; she is there for Jesus' last breath (Matt 27:56, Mark 15:40) and now she is the first one to the grave to anoint his dead body on Sunday morning (John 20:1-9). When the light comes up, faithful Mary is bringing spices to anoint dead Jesus, wondering what in the world has happened to her world and her Rabbi.

Every person here this morning has a unique story and every one of our stories has pain, discouragement and the opportunity to despair. Arguably one of the most significant choices we have in life is the choice of whether to yield to despair and the imprisonment of our circumstances or to hope.

The resurrected Jesus doesn't leave us in our tears and despair. Jesus has made a way back from this ultimate far off country. He has made a way out of that pit of despair and loneliness, a way back to the Father's house.

Resurrection hope is the only way forward.

¹⁰ So the disciples went back to their homes. ¹¹ But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she bent down and looked into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Mary replied, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put 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? Who are you looking for?" Because she thought he was the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will take him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came and informed the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what Jesus had said to her. (John 20:10-18)

Where did the angels come from? They hadn't been there a few moments before, when Peter and John had entered Jesus' tomb. Maybe they were there? When people are afraid, angels tend to tell them not to be. In Matthew, an angel tells Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife" (Matt 1:20) In Luke, the angel Gabriel tells Mary she's having a baby, and says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). Then when Jesus is born, an angel appears to shepherds watching their flocks at night and says, "Do not be afraid; for I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Angels must understand the instinctual fear in human beings pretty well.

The account of the resurrection in Matthew 28:5, the angels say, "Do not be afraid." The two angels ask Mary Magdalene here in John's account, "Woman, why are you weeping?" When people are in tears, angels ask why.

Jesus asks the same question, "Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" (vs. 15). Mary responds, "Where is Jesus dead body?" (vs.15) and Jesus tenderly says her name, "Mary" (vs. 16). Hearing her name spoken by Jesus, Mary turned towards Jesus, cries out "Teacher!" and clings to him. Mary recognizes Jesus' voice. Jesus declared ten chapters earlier that the sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd and their Shepherd will ensure they will come in and go out and find pasture (John 10:9). Isaiah 30 proclaims,

¹⁸ For this reason the LORD is ready to show you mercy; he sits on his throne, ready to have compassion on you. Indeed, the LORD is a just God; all who wait for him in faith will be blessed. ¹⁹ For people will live in Zion; in Jerusalem you will weep no more. When he hears your cry of despair, he will indeed show you mercy; when he hears it, he will respond to you. ²⁰ The sovereign master will give you distress to eat and suffering to drink; but your teachers (Rabbi) will no longer be hidden; your eyes will see them. (Isaiah 30:18-20)

Mary sees her resurrected Savior and Shepherd and clings to Jesus. The last time she let Jesus out of her sight, they took him away. She's not about to let it happen again. Jesus responds and basically says - don't cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father.

What does verse 17 mean?

<p>Some think that Jesus' resurrection body was so new and different, that Jesus didn't want to weird her out. Especially in light of Jesus' invitation to Thomas to touch his wounds (20:24-29), this probably isn't the best explanation.</p>	<p>Some think Jesus is warning Mary that his relationship to her is now going to be different and that he won't be around for long and she shouldn't try to keep Him or possess Him.</p>	<p>I actually take the simplest reading of this. I think it's more likely that Jesus is saying that you do not have to hang on to me as if I were about to disappear permanently. This is a time for joy and sharing the good news, not for clutching me as if I were your private dream-come-true. Stop clinging to me, but go and tell my disciples that I am in process of ascending to my Father and your Father. All who believe can now feel the closeness Jesus had with his Father. So Jesus tells his "sister" Mary to go tell his "brothers," the disciples, that everything is okay.</p>
---	--	---

Hope is a choice that every child of God has because of the resurrection of our Savior.

I want you to stand in that garden with Mary and hear the resurrected Jesus say your name. He is alive and will not leave you in tears. Jesus has come to uproot the thorns and thistles of our life and replace them with blossoms and fruit.

Jesus doesn't leave us in our tears and despair. Jesus has made a way back from this ultimate far off country. He has made a way out of that pit of despair and loneliness, a way back to the Father's house. Hope is worth fighting for, because resurrection hope gives life.

If the Father in fact raised the Son from the dead, then everything is different. If death is conquered, then we have reason to hope and to love and give our lives away. If Jesus is alive, we must not despair.

In the hustle and bustle of your life, is there any moment in your life where you pause and hear the voice of your resurrected Savior?

What ways are you cooperating with the Holy Spirit to move you towards hope?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you,⁵ who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials.⁷ Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold—gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away—and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,⁹ because you are attaining the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:3-9)