

Iain Macritchie: John 20

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] We can turn back to the chapter that we read together in John chapter 20. And I think we can read verses 11 to 18 together again.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting with the body of Jesus had lain.

One at the head and one at the feet. 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.

Having said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing. But she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?

Supposing him to be the gardener she said to him, Sir, if you've carried him away tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away.

[1 : 0 4] Jesus said to her, Mary, She turned and said to him in Aramaic, Rabbony, which means teacher. Jesus said to her, do not cling to me, for 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. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

And if we were to take a text this evening, we could take it from verse 16. Jesus said to her, Mary, She turned and she said to him in Aramaic, Rabbony, which means teacher.

And this evening we continue our study in encounters with Christ. Here we have our third encounter. This morning I couldn't be with you, I was preaching in Shobos, but this morning many of us here, we remembered the Lord's death.

We remembered that sacrificial act of love that has provided sinners with a way of escape, a new and a living way. But aren't we thankful tonight that this was only half of the story, because we worship, we remember not merely a man who died on a cross, but one who three days later rose triumphant out of the grave.

[2 : 4 2] And here we have a post resurrection encounter before us here tonight, an encounter that took place after the resurrection. And it's this encounter that I'd like us to look at together just for a short time tonight under two simple headings.

A faithful follower and a risen Saviour. A faithful follower and a risen Saviour.

Firstly then let's look together at this faithful follower. Here we have Mary Magdalene. Now you remember that she was the one out of whom Christ had previously cast out seven devils.

And in response to Christ making her clean, if you like, she's the one that showed her faithfulness to her Lord throughout, the one who showed her faithfulness not only by following him, but by being present at the cross as he was crucified right before her very eyes.

She was the one who no doubt would have witnessed us as the crowds would have been shouting away with him, crucify him, crucify him. And then she would have no doubt gone on to hear the cries of her Saviour on the cross when he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[4 : 16] She would have witnessed the darkness, the earthquake, and finally the silence that followed the death of her precious Saviour.

This was a woman that was faithful to the end, to the one who had changed her life beyond all recognition. Now tonight we pick up the story in verse 11 where we find Mary weeping outside Jesus' tomb following his death.

She'd come to the tomb early in the morning, we read in another Gospel that she came with spices in order to anoint the body of Christ. And as she did so, she was no doubt seeking some kind of comfort by being there at this tomb.

And in many ways there's nothing unusual here. Even now quite often we find friends and family making their way to the grave of a loved one who has just passed away perhaps to lay flowers.

People find comfort from doing that. However, the visitation that we have before us tonight, this visitation to Christ's tomb is one that would be anything but normal for Mary.

[5 : 42] Because when Mary got to this tomb, the stone had been rolled away. This was a tomb that was in the side of a rock, if you like, and there would have been a big round stone in front of the tomb to seal it.

But by the time she got to the tomb, this stone had been moved and the grave was effectively open. You can imagine how she felt in a blind panic seeing this open tomb.

She ran to get Peter and John who came back with her and confirmed that not only was this tomb empty, sorry, open, but it was also empty.

Now we're not going to focus on their reactions just now, that will be for another time, but we do read that they didn't hang about, they went back to their own homes, leaving Mary here.

And here she is outside this tomb, weeping at the fact that as far as she is concerned, someone has taken away the body of her saviour.

[6 : 52] This was a constant unrestrained sobbing. Samuel Rutherford said that missing Christ is the most bitter ingredient that the Christian has to drink in his cup of sorrow.

And you know, I think I agree with him. The Christian can have so many trials and difficulties in their lives, but surely none so painful as a lack of awareness of the presence and comfort of Jesus.

Of course Christ had many, many times told his followers that he must die and rise again so in light of this, we would assume that when Mary came to the tomb and found that it was open, that this grave was open, it would have been no surprise to her.

But it was. She was indeed a faithful follower of Christ, but yet she lacked so much understanding.

She had heard the words of Christ, yet she, like so many of his followers at this time, he just couldn't grasp the reality of what was actually going to happen, the reality that Christ had to die and rise again.

[8 : 17] And so when Christ did die, when she witnessed that horrific death in a sense a part of her died with him, it was as if both her faith and her hope had died.

She, like many others, had had so many great hopes and expectations from this King Jesus, yet all these had been dashed into pieces following the crucifixion.

How through this can be of us, we can be some of the most faithful followers of Christ and if that is your your to be commended for that, but yet circumstances in life can lead us to see that there is so much about our Lord that we do not understand.

Sometimes the way he directs our providence just leaves us thinking why, but yet, like Mary, we carry on following.

Because although faith and hope may appear to have died within Mary, there's one thing that sure is alive, and that is her love for her Saviour.

[9 : 41] In spite of the disillusionment, the despair of all of Christ's followers at this point, they all still loved their master and they couldn't help but think about him and grieve over him.

Here in Mary, we have such a great example of simple love, a love that had brought her to this tomb early this morning so that she could anoint the body of her Saviour.

She is determined to do all that she can for him, even in his death. Isn't that lovely?

And it's not true that if we're in Christ tonight, in many ways he's cast out seven devils from us too, that he's taken us from darkness into his own most marvellous light.

I wonder, do we too respond with that same spirit of love and service as Mary did?

[10 : 54] Now as she stands there, as she's weeping, we read that she stooped down to look into the tomb. And as she does so, it's as if she can't quite believe what is happening and you can just imagine her wanting to double check just to make sure that the disciples hadn't missed something and perhaps Christ's body was still there.

I'm sure we can identify with this clutching of straws that sometimes were prone to during times of crisis or immense grief. But Christ isn't there.

And instead in the tomb she's faced with two angels. Now we see in Mark that for at least one of these angels, they were in the form of men.

And throughout scripture we read of many encounters with angels, but often accompanying these encounters is fear.

But it doesn't appear here that Mary has any fear. Sorrow, yes, but no fear. Her mind is so firmly fixed at trying to find the body of her saviour that she cannot see or think about anything else.

[12 : 26] Why are you weeping, they ask her? This was a question that in many ways revealed Mary's ignorance.

You see the very fact that Mary had come to this empty tomb, it wasn't a cause to weep, but rather a cause to rejoice.

This was proof that Christ had risen triumphant over the grave. Had Mary come to the tomb and found that Christ was actually there and the angels knew this, she would then have had cause to weep.

Why are you weeping? To which she replies, they've taken away my Lord and I don't know where they've laid Him.

All she can think about is the physical. Haven't we seen that in the encounters that we've had over the past couple of weeks, looking to the physical, unable to see the spiritual, she's unable to see the significance, the wonder of the empty tomb that lays before her.

[13 : 50] And I wonder if we can identify with Mary's tears. It's true that we do not grieve the body of a missing saviour, but surely we still ought to mourn.

If we like Mary, our faithful followers of Christ, love Him dearly with every fibre of our being, it stands to reason that we too should be crying tears for Him.

Tears of grief over the fact that the name of Jesus is so blatantly and so openly being trampled under foot in society and the media all around us.

Tears of hurt when we see His laws and His days being completely disregarded.

Tears of sorrow when we see mankind responding to what is on offer to them in the Gospel, the precious truths that are there to be had, and responding with the words, I will not have this man to rule over me.

[15 : 10] And do we not also have tears of longing so often in our experience, longing when we ourselves feel that Christ is so far from us.

And as then Mary becomes aware of somebody standing behind her, perhaps she saw the expression of the faces of the angels as they looked over her shoulder, indicating that there was someone standing there, or perhaps she heard footsteps coming behind her, or perhaps it wasn't.

Personally, I prefer to go along with these lines, although we cannot be dogmatic about the Scriptures and clear, but perhaps it was that the Holy Spirit made Mary aware that Christ was behind her.

And in doing so, He prompted her to turn around and to come face to face with the one who she thought was the Gardener.

Now there's speculation again as to why Mary didn't recognise Jesus here. Some say it was probably because it was dark, she couldn't see Him properly.

[16 : 32] Others say that it was because she was crying, her eyes were so filled with tears that she wasn't able to see Him for who He was. Others say that she was deliberately blinded by God for a time so that she would not recognise Christ.

I prefer to think that it was because there was something different in the appearance of Christ, something supernatural that had occurred following the resurrection.

He was still human, he was still man, but yet he was different. Let's not forget that before the resurrection Christ was the suffering sin-bearer.

He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. His whole life was characterised by suffering and pain and sorrow of unimaginable kind, suffering that would no doubt have been visible in his face.

We often see when people are suffering we can see it in their face. And especially when he would have been on the cross, this would no doubt have been the last vision of Christ alive that Mary would have had.

[17 : 53] And it would, as Isaiah the Prophet describes when he says, she would have seen that his countenance or his appearance were so marred beyond recognition.

But now Christ had conquered the devil and sin. He had satisfied the justice of God and he was no longer weighed down by all the burdens and fearful enemies that he had had to endure for all these years.

Surely then it's not unfair to say that Mary didn't recognise Christ because his face had been gloriously transformed.

And then he spoke to her, woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?

Aren't those words just so encouraging? Here we have this distraught woman, a woman who's at her wit's end looking so desperately for her saviour.

[19 : 09] And here he is right in front of her. Why are you weeping? What beautiful words of comfort. He cares about her tears.

He desires to comfort this woman in the same way that he desires to comfort you and me. We too can be so distraught.

We can be in the depths of despair. Perhaps this is because we've lost a loved one, someone very, very close to us. Perhaps it's because we're having difficulties in our family that no one else knows about.

Or we're having financial struggles or struggles with our health or even with our faith. And in it all we're desperately looking for God, but we just can't find Him.

Doesn't this show us that so often He is there right in front of us? And we don't even recognise it or realise it.

[20 : 18] Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Christ in His question shows me that it's because she's looking for a dead Jesus.

A dead saviour. That is why she is weeping. Her confusion has led her to look for the wrong thing. And her response only confirms it. She was so sincere, but yet she was sincerely wrong.

If you've carried Him away, tell me where you've laid Him and I will take Him away. She still cannot see Jesus but who He is. She still cannot understand that the resurrection has taken place.

But yet in her own way she is seeking Him and she continues to show her love for Him.

She is here offering without thinking to carry away the weight of a body that would be totally beyond her strength. She says that if this gardener would show her where this body was, she would take it away herself.

[21 : 33] This was love offering to do the impossible as love so often does. But what an example to us tonight as to how the Lord should be served.

The spirit that we should have in serving the Lord, not thinking anything is too great. With Mary, He detected a seeking heart and He came and He responded to this woman's plight.

Tonight you too might, like Mary, find yourself in a dark tomb, in a place where you're desperately seeking Christ but you cannot find Him.

And all I can say is don't give up. Keep looking for Him because if there is seeking on your part, I can guarantee you there will be seeking on His part. If you are going after Him, He will be coming after you.

You keep seeking because He knows that you are seeking in the same way that He knew Mary was seeking. He can hear your cries to Him and He promises to come to the door of the tomb and to provide for you a way of escape out of that darkness.

[23 : 08] We read then that Mary turns away from this gardener. We know this because it says later on that she turns back to Him, to Christ. Mary turns away from this gardener obviously wanting to focus back on the empty grave, thinking upon what's at the forefront of her mind.

She wasn't really interested in this man who as far as she could see didn't have any answers for her. All that she wanted to do was to find Jesus and how ironic it is that in her efforts to find Jesus, here He is right in front of her very eyes.

He has found her. Little does she know that yes, He was a gardener, but not in the sense that she thought because He was and He is the Divine Gardener, the one who is the cultivator of souls, the one who not only plants seeds in the hearts of men and women, but can also make that seed grow and bear fruit. And then the great revelation, Mary.

It was at this point that everything changes for this woman, this faithful follower who by one word, a word that was more powerful than any sermon, realized that here in front of her eyes was the one that she'd been looking for all along, which brings us onto our second point.

Here was the risen Savior. And just like the woman of Samaria and Zacchaeus, Christ reveals himself to her by speaking to her, by speaking personally to her, by calling her by her name.

[25 : 12] He doesn't say Mary Magdalene. He makes no reference to her past, but he calls her by her first name Mary.

How personal, how direct, how comforting for her, even though she had got it so, so wrong as we so often do ourselves, that she'd completely misunderstood what had happened to Christ, although she was slow to comprehend who he was.

He nonetheless saw in Mary a genuine, bold, heartfelt determination, and he honored her desire to honor him.

What an encouragement that is for us and an exhortation to look daily for Christ, to search the Scriptures, even when we don't understand what they're saying to us, that we would carry on, and that we would truly anticipate that here Christ could reveal himself to us. Mary.

Here we have the voice of the good and the gentle shepherd who John has already spoken of earlier, the one who knows his sheep by their name and tenderly and lovingly reaches out to them, healing their wounds by the power of his word.

[26 : 56] And then we see a response, a response that was so simple yet so powerful.

Raboni, Raboni, meaning teacher or master, all of a sudden made it to Jesus for who he is, the risen Savior, the one who has in times gone past as she followed him, taught her so much.

Can you imagine how she felt? She was sure that Christ was dead, and here he is, alive in front of her. In the twinkling of an eye, her world goes from one of mournful sorrow to ecstatic joy and elation.

Isn't this the perfect example of the transforming power of Christ calling us by our name here in Mary?

And I think it's also lovely to note that it's this insignificant woman, Mary Magdalene, who the Lord chose to be the first of countless millions to be brought face to face with the resurrected Christ.

[28 : 28] He chose to reveal himself to this ordinary, everyday woman, this sinner saved by grace. What a picture of God's love this is. He's no respecter of persons, of status or even of previous sins.

And as I said last week, no doubt I'll say again and again, he graciously reveals himself to all who seek him, no matter who you are.

Of course, without this wonderful revelation, the whole gospel message would be in vain. Had Christ not revealed himself to Mary Magdalene here at the tomb or to anyone else, I may as well leave this pulpit and go home.

Your minister may as well pack his bags and leave. If we were worshiping a Christ who only died on a cross and was buried in a grave, our worship would be a farce.

1 Corinthians 15 tells us, if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is also vain, you are yet in your sin.

[29 : 53] You see, the resurrection is the stone that holds up the arch of the gospel. It was the late John Stott who said that Christianity in its very essence is a resurrection religion.

The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, just like if you remove that stone, Christianity is destroyed. The gospel falls down.

And it's this resurrection that is evidence that tonight we can confidently and boldly worship a living God for tonight our God lives.

You can just imagine the scene. Mary is completely overjoyed that she's been reunited with her Savior and what a feeling it is.

I don't know if you can identify this. When you've been searching for Christ, when you've been looking for Him and then unexpectedly out of the blue, maybe in His Word or in a sermon or wherever, He reveals Himself to you.

[31 : 12] There is absolutely no greater joy in the world, friends, than that sweet communion with the resurrected Lord.

And here all Mary can do is embrace Him. She never wants to let Him go and you can understand this.

But He tells her, do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

She wasn't. No one can blame her for this, looking for uninterrupted fellowship with Christ. But He tells her to wait. To wait until He has ascended to be forever with the Father.

I don't think we can say that He objected to being touched, otherwise how would we explain His words to Thomas in verse 27? Then He said to Thomas, put your finger here and see My hands and put your hand and place it in My side.

[32 : 22] No doubt Mary is here thinking that Christ is going to stay with them and that things would go back to the way that they once were. But things had changed.

He is here telling her that yes, their fellowship would be resumed, but it would be far richer and more blessed than ever before.

This would be a spiritual communion with the risen and ascended Lord. Friends, it's that same communion that you and I enjoy this night if we are in Christ.

But that's not the end. Because yes, Christ died. He rose again. He ascended to be with the Father. All this is true. But there's more.

I'm sure this verse would probably have been read this morning at the communion service. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Until He comes.

[33 : 39] This morning's communion that you gathered here, those of you who did, this was but a temporary arrangement. Because if we're in Christ tonight, we're looking forward to a greater day, a day where we won't have to rise from the table.

A day where we'll enjoy unbroken, sinless, eternal communion with our Heavenly Father. Christ was, and the minister touched on this on Saturday night in the Gaelic, Christ was the first fruits of the dead.

But there is another harvest to be taken in, another day when the tombs, when the graves will be opened. That day when the dead in Christ will rise first. That second coming when we too will be resurrected.

Here I am again. You'll have to forgive me with a shorter catechism. Question 38, what benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? And listen to the answer. It's so encouraging.

At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment. And made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity. What a thought.

[35 : 09] What a day when faithful followers such as Mary Magdalene and such as you, I hope, will come face to face with that risen Saviour, never to part again.

Friends as you leave here tonight. If you're in Christ, let not your profession be confined to sitting at the Lord's table. That is an act of obedience and it's good. But the Lord requires war.

He requires that you walk as those who are worshiping a living God. That your faith would be living. That you would faithfully like Mary did follow Christ motivated by a deep love for him.

And a desire in your heart to embrace him and to never let him go. And if you're here and you're yet to know what it is to be a follower of the risen Saviour, you keep looking. Just as Mary did.

Don't ever give up. Keep looking because you can be sure that if you do, he will hear your voice.

[36 : 33] He will hear your voice and he will call you by your name. And my greatest desire for you tonight and every other night friends is that your eyes would be open so that you may fall down before the risen Saviour.

That you would respond to his voice with that word of saving realisation on your lips.