

Mary
John 20:1-18

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

During our mid-week Lenten services, we used as texts for meditation, the seven words of Christ from the cross. Today, we look at the Word He speaks to Mary, a very simple word, one word, "Mary."

Mary Magdalene was first to the tomb. She left hurriedly, in a state of shock. Meeting Simon Peter and John, she exclaimed, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him!"

At this announcement, they run to the tomb, John arriving first. John looks in, but does not enter. Peter, ever the bold one, arrives after John and goes into the tomb. There is evidence of the resurrection: the strips of cloth in which Jesus has been wrapped were lying there, and the burial cloth from around His head folded and lying separate.

Peter walked away, back to his home, wondering. John saw the evidence and believed. Neither disciple however, understood the significance, for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead.

There is much speculation on what it means when it says that John saw and believed. Did he, now seeing the empty tomb, believe Mary's words that Jesus was gone? Did he believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? Was way the clothes were folded the evidence that He believed? If so, why didn't he speak out about that fact, boldly proclaiming it? Was the evidence not enough, so that he believed, but he had doubts? Was he ashamed that he did not trust Jesus' word that He must suffer, die, and rise on the third day, and then had to see the evidence in order to believe? To make a statement definitively one way or the other is to say more than the words of our text say.

What facts we do know are these. Jesus had foretold the events of these past four days on numerous occasions to His followers. In Matthew's Gospel, we have one account, *As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.* (Matthew 17:22-23 ESV)

They were distressed because they did not understand. They had not wanted their Lord, their Teacher, and friend to have to endure such things. They were bound up in grief, for they had seen Him die. Now, going to His tomb in their grief, He is not there. They saw, but things were not clicking in their minds. It was like He had not said He would be raised. At the empty tomb, they either forget His previous words, or did not make the full connection. They certainly did not understand and believe the significance of these events to their eternal salvation.

What happened is, as often happens with us, we hear the words, but do not understand what they mean. They had not believed Jesus at His word. Although they had confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, they did not believe the Word of God in Christ Jesus.

Mary and the disciples had seen Jesus suffer. They had seen His body, a bloody mess upon the cross. They had seen Him die. They had watched as His dead, limp body had been removed from the cross and laid in the tomb. But, they did not take God at His word.

That is the oldest sin in the world. It is the first sin. It is what happened in the garden. *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really*

say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1 ESV)

Did God really say? That question is at the root of all sin. Did God really say that I should trust in Him above ALL things? Did God really say that I should talk to my neighbor about that issue, not talk to everybody else about it? Did God really say that sex is reserved for one man and one woman only after they are married? Did God really say that I must forgive ALL those who sin against me, or I will not be forgiven? Did God really say that I must not gossip, even if it is the truth? Did God really say that I am not to lust after the possessions of others? Did God really say that I cannot worship Him whenever and however I want to?

And the answer to those and every other question that begins with, "Did God really say," is – YES!!!

Did God really say that there is salvation in no one else except Christ? Did God really say that my works do not even help a little bit toward gaining heaven? YES! YES! YES!

Did Christ really say that I must take up my cross and follow Him? Did Christ really say that He comes first, even before family? YES!

Did Christ, who is true God, really say, "On the third day I will rise?" Did He really say, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it?" Yes!

Mary, through her tears, wondering where Jesus is, since she did not believe His word that He would rise, looks again into the tomb. An angel asks her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

Her unbelief in the Words of Christ is evident in what takes place in our text as she responds, "*They have taken my Lord away,*" she said, "*and I don't know where they have put him.*" At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

She did not realize it was Jesus? How come? It says she saw Him, didn't she recognize Him? No, she did not recognize Him. Jesus had been laid in the tomb, and she remembered only what He looked like.

Remember what Jesus had endured? Imagine what He had looked like before they laid Him in the tomb – He had been beaten, whipped, and crucified. There was little of His flesh that was bruised, beaten, or torn. If you have seen *The Passion of the Christ*, you have some idea what He may have looked like when they took Him down from the cross. Just as Isaiah foretold, *As many were astonished at him, his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* (Isaiah 52:14 ESV)

At the point of our text, Christ has been glorified. His body is pristine and beautiful, healed beyond all comprehension. Only the marks that give glory to God remain, holes from the nails and the spear, but those where the least visible of His abused features. Before Mary stood a man of clean skin, no bruises and no bloody wounds. Is it any wonder that through her tears and her expectations of what Jesus should look like that she did not recognize Him?

Jesus speaks to her "*Woman,*" He said, "*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.*" Jesus said to her, "*Mary.*" She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "*Rabboni!*" (which means Teacher). (vv. 11-16)

Jesus speaks her name, and it is like a light goes on. She recognizes Him. This is not just the recognition brought about by the familiar knowledge of the sound of His voice. Something more takes place. Christ speaks and faith is wrought. God said, and Mary believed. All it took is the Word of Christ! The Spirit at work in the

Word of Christ made Mary a believer.

On that first day of the week, Jesus said, “Mary.” One word, and Mary believed. She then told them all, “I have seen the Lord!”

God spoke your name at your baptism – faith was wrought! It is that simple.

The same is true today. We could ask, did really Christ say, *"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."*? (Luke 24:46-47 ESV) Yes, He did.

Today, repentance was proclaimed to you. All those times you wondered if God's Word really said what it did, are forgiven. How? Christ through His called servant of the Word, spoke to you, “Your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” By that Word of Christ, your sins are gone and faith is wrought in your heart to believe that it is indeed true. Christ spoke, and in all confidence you can proclaim, “I have seen the Lord!”

It is Christ who is present in the Word that will soon be spoken, “This is my body... this is my blood... given and shed for you for the remission of sin.” Christ’s body and His blood will be present under the elements of bread and wine. You will eat and drink. Salvation will be given to you and eternal life bestowed. Through that Word, your faith will be strengthened to believe that all these things are true. Christ speaks, and in all confidence you can proclaim, “I have seen the Lord!”

Jesus spoke such a simple word, just her name, and Mary believed. Jesus works the same miracle today! His Word does great things! He is risen! Amen.