

## **Who Are You Looking For?**

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Where: New Life Church of the Nazarene

When: 16 April 2017

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Have you ever gone looking for someone and couldn't locate them?

Many of you are aware that Darlene was raised in a foster home. She and her brother were removed from their parents' home and placed in different relative's homes when they were very little. The last time she saw her brother was shortly after she graduated high school. She had no idea where he was living. We've tried off and on over many years to locate him with no success. A week ago, she received a Facebook message from a young lady asking if she was his brother. He had been searching for her for many years and his step-daughter was finally able to locate her. There was much joy that they were able to reconnect after nearly 40 years.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb that first Easter Sunday looking for a dead man, Jesus who she had witnessed being crucified. She and the other women had gone there to complete the burial process. John focuses in on Mary Magdalene but we know from the other Gospel accounts that Mary along with a number of other women went to the tomb as soon as possible after the Sabbath to complete the burial by bringing all the spices to pack onto Jesus' body.

When they arrive at the tomb the stone has been rolled away and the body of Jesus is missing. I can picture her outside that tomb sobbing in grief when Jesus approaches her asks her who she is looking for. She doesn't recognize him until he speaks her name and then her grief turns into joy because the one she was looking for was standing right there in front of her.

He's Alive! He's Alive! He's Alive! I've seen the Lord and He's Alive!

That was the shocking surprise that Mary Magdalene got when she visited that garden tomb on the first day of the week.

There was no joy as Mary approached the tomb that early morning. Her life, the lives of the disciples had been devastated because Jesus had been crucified. He was dead. She along with so many others had committed their lives to following this Rabbi, Jesus. They had left behind jobs and family and friends to follow him because they believed that he was the Messiah. Now she and the others were going to the tomb to finish up that burial process.

How hopeless and devastated she must have been. All of her hopes and dreams had been shattered when Jesus died on the cross. She was broken hearted. Have you ever been in a situation where your dreams had been shattered?

One of my best friends in high school also attended the church that we were members of. Billy was an awesome guy and a great Christian. It seemed like he was liked by everyone. He had a promising career ahead of him in baseball. His dad had played

minor league ball in his younger years and Billy was heading in that direction as well.

His dad owned a car dealership about 15 miles from where they lived. Billy and his younger brothers worked around the dealership for their dad. On a cold December 26, 1978, the day after Christmas 17 year old Billy had been at the dealership working. When the dealership closed for the day, he got in his car to head home for dinner. About a half mile from home he hit a patch of ice and lost control of the car and wrapped it around a tree in a neighbors front yard.

Billy was killed instantly and in that moment of time all the dreams that his parents, particularly his dad had for him died. The funeral was tough although it was a celebration of life and of Billy's Christian faith. Our little church was jam packed with high school kids.

It was hard in the upcoming months for many. Watching the family struggle to deal with the loss. Billy's 4 younger brothers struggled without him. They were heartbroken but God did bring healing into their lives over the years.

That's the way Mary felt as she approached the garden tomb that morning, completely heartbroken, hopeless, wondering how she was going to go on.

Running through Mary's mind as she approached the cemetery where the tomb was located was how were they going to remove the stone from the entrance of the tomb. Would the soldiers that had been stationed to guard the tomb even let them near it.

John records that she arrived at the tomb and she sees the stone has been removed from the entrance. The Roman Guards must have already left because he doesn't mention them. Mary must have looked into the tomb and sees that the body of Jesus is not there.

What was Mary's response to what she found? Her first response was "I've got to go find Peter and John and tell them what we've found". John says she came running to Peter and John. That must have been quite the site to see a group of women come running out of a cemetery in the early morning hours. Anybody that they passed in the street must have been wondering what in the world had happened in the cemetery. They were desperate, they had to let the disciples know that the body of Jesus had been taken.

I've often wondered what was going through Peter and John's minds as Mary and the other women come running up to the house that they are staying in with this story that the body of Jesus is missing from his tomb. It seems like their first thought was no, I can't believe this, I've got to see it for myself. That must just be part of human nature when we hear about a terrible tragedy or an accident or some type of disaster we just have to see for ourselves.

Peter and John take off running for the cemetery, to the tomb to verify what the women told them. The women must have followed quickly after them as we'll see in a moment. Was it a race to see who would get there first?

John reaches the tomb first and he just bends over and looks inside and all he sees are the strips of linen lying where the body of Jesus should have

been. Peter runs up and goes right inside the tomb. He sees the linen as well as the burial cloth that had been placed around Jesus head. He sees all that and I wonder what was going through his mind. The body is gone, but why is the linen still here, surely they would have taken it to. It looks like the body just came out from the wrappings, those linens look like an empty shell. What has happened here?

John finally goes into the tomb and he tried to take it all in. He sees everything that Peter saw, the missing body, the empty linens.

We don't really know what was going on in Peters mind. Did he believe that Jesus had risen from the dead at that point? We do know John's response, he says "He saw and believed".

John went from discouraged and hopeless to faith that Jesus had risen from the dead. What an emotional rollercoaster he's been on over the past 3 or 4 days. I'm guessing that John is now thinking, "Where is he, when will we see him?"

Notice the little added information there in verse nine: "They did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." John believe that he had indeed risen but at that point they still didn't understand that the scripture said that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

The resurrection is not something that the disciples were anticipating. In their minds when Jesus died on the cross, that was it, he was dead, gone.

John records that the disciples went back to their homes but Mary stayed there outside the tomb crying. At some point she bends over to look inside

and she sees two angels. I think I'd have been more than a little startled, after all, Peter and John had just been in there. There were no angels there when they went into the tomb.

Apparently at this point Mary was still operating under the assumption that someone had taken the body of Jesus. John saw and he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Mary saw and she told the angels that someone has taken Jesus and she doesn't know where he's at. Hopelessness and grief can often blind us to the reality around us and I think that is what is happening with Mary at this point. Something beyond description has just occurred and Mary doesn't see it. Mary wasn't at the point of believing that Jesus would rise from the dead.

John says that Mary turns around and Jesus is standing right there before her but she doesn't realize it's Jesus. She thinks the man is the gardener. In her grief and hopeless state she says to him "if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus doesn't answer her question. He doesn't say, "Hey look at me, it's me Jesus".

Jesus simply says to her "Mary".

When I read this my mind immediately goes to John chapter 10 where Jesus talks about the good shepherd. Listen to this passage.

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman

opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” (John 10:1-6)

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)

Jesus speaks her name and Mary responds. She hears his voice and knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is Jesus.

In that moment of time the hopeless is washed away all the anguish of the past days is gone, the darkness is gone. In that moment Mary goes from unbelief, from stuck on the idea that Jesus is dead and someone has taken his body. She goes from all that to faith and belief in the fact that indeed Jesus has risen from the dead.

Mary cries out Rabboni!. Notice she doesn't say "Rabboni?" as in the form of a question like she's not sure that it really is Jesus. No she cries out "Rabboni" knowing without a doubt that the one who just called her name is Jesus.

This is the beginning of her faith in the Risen Lord. We don't know but I can almost imagine her falling to his feet and holding onto him. Jesus says to her "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father."

Another way of translating that passage is "do not continue to hold on to me". The relationship between Mary and Jesus is different. He is now the resurrected Lord. She's no longer following a teacher, but now she's following the resurrected Messiah. Things are different now. It's just like with us when we come to faith in Christ. The old way of living won't work anymore. It's all changed and the same holds true for Mary.

Jesus says to her, don't hold on to me but go instead to my brothers and tell them "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Note the change in relationship here as well. Prior to Jesus death he referred to his followers as disciples and now he says my brothers. When we come to saving faith in Jesus our relationship changes. We're adopted into the family of God we become sons and daughters of God. In essence we become brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Mary hurries off to find the disciples with the news "I have seen the Lord!" Can you just imagine just for a moment the excitement as she's heading to their homes. Everything that has happened over the past several days is running through her mind and then finally the excitement of actually touching the risen Jesus. It's more than she ever hoped for. I can imagine the excitement as heads to the disciples oblivious to everyone and everything around her as she keeps telling herself over and over again that Jesus is risen!

I have seen the Lord! Mary tells the disciples that she's seen Jesus, that she's talked to him that she's touched him. She tells them everything that he had said to her.



He is Risen! Everything changed that first Easter morning when Jesus rose from the dead. On the cross and through the resurrection Jesus rose victorious over sin and death. Through what Jesus did the power of sin was broken, the power of death was broken.

That is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. Through faith in Jesus we can have a restored relationship with God. We can be reconciled to God. That means we can be stored into a right relationship, a close relationship with God. The separation that sin caused is removed by saving faith in Jesus.

What a strange and mysterious story. The greatest event in human history is dramatically unfolding, and the first three eye-witnesses have very strange and mixed responses at best. Mary reduces it to grave robbing, the beloved disciple sees and believes, Peter sees and nothing. After witnessing the empty tomb, Peter and John just go home. Where is all the hype, the celebration, the reality of the fact that what Jesus predicted happened— no party, no ticker tape parade, no news coverage, nothing. Isn't this just like God? It seems God has God's way of working in human history. This story sounds very familiar. Just several years earlier in the evening, the Son of God was born into the world in a stable. A few folks showed up but, in light of the magnitude of the event, not much response from the world really. Again God does what

God does in the time and way God deems necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Three people, three different responses. All three ultimately believed but their initial responses were different. Peter took a while to believe, John believe right away after seeing the evidence, Mary believed when Jesus spoke to her.

John saw and believed. Peter looked in and nothing. Mary recognized Jesus only after he spoke her name. God loves no matter what our response is. That is the good news of this story. God brings resurrection because of who God is. The reality of the empty tomb reminds us God is at work in the world doing what only God can do. In all humility, without much fanfare, and certainly not dependent on the response of people, God goes about God's business; our lives and the life of the world will never be the same again.<sup>2</sup>

How do we respond to the Resurrection? Is it just a great story or do we respond with belief in the risen Jesus?

I really like the story that Max Lucado told in his book "Six Hours One Friday". In that book he tells the story of a missionary in Brazil who comes across a tribe of Indians that are in need of medical help. People are dying because of a disease that is ravaging the population.

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin, Travis "Who are you looking for?"

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

There is a hospital not too far from where the Indians live but it is on the other side of the river from where they live. They are afraid of the river because they believe it's inhabited by evil spirits and if they enter the river they will surely die.

The missionary tries to explain to them that the river is harmless. He takes them to the river bank and puts his hand in the water but they won't go in. He walks into the water and splashes himself with it and they still won't go in. Finally he dives into the water and swims across to the other side safely. It was only then that they would follow him.

Isn't that what Jesus did for us? He entered the river of death and came out on the other side so that we might no longer fear sin and death, but find eternal life in Him.

But, simply hearing the story of Easter is not enough: you need to encounter the Savior. Simply knowing about Easter won't cut it. God must impact your life. To have Him really make a difference in the situations of your life, you need to know the resurrected Lord for yourself.

It's not good enough that your parents had met Jesus and had a relationship with Him. It's not good enough that your grandparents were Christians. You need to know the Savior. You need to have an encounter with the resurrected Lord for yourself. And until you do you'll be a lot like a Mary standing outside the tomb. You'll see that the rock has been moved, you'll see the empty grave clothes but you will still be feeling hopeless and in despair.

Until you encounter the Savior, you'll be a lot like Peter, John and Mary. Jesus was alive—the

Resurrection had happened—but until they encountered Jesus for themselves it didn't make much of a difference in their lives. They were still feeling lost and hopeless.

But the mere recognition of the presence of the resurrected Christ turns Mary's tears into a triumphal shout.

Mary came looking for a dead man, Jesus so that she could complete the burial. Peter and John came to see if the body really had been taken. Why have you come this morning? Who did you come to see today?

Jesus is alive this morning, it's a brand new day! But my question is this; is that fact making a difference for you?

Listen, for Easter to be Easter--for it to be more than just a day with colored eggs, ham dinners, and family gatherings it must include encountering the Savior. For Easter to be Easter--for it to be "a brand new day," the missing component is an encounter with the resurrected Lord!