

Seeing, Hearing, and Knowing

John 20:11-18

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“But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They 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.’ ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵‘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.’ ¹⁶Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning 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.

John 20:11-18

For Mary Magdalene, it wasn’t a good Friday. The world as she had come to know it with Jesus ended when His life ended. This was the man who had ushered her into the kingdom of God. Mark and Luke say He cast seven devils out of her.

Matthew says, “While Jesus was dying on Calvary’s cross, darkness covered the land.” It was pitch black on Friday from 12 noon to 3 p.m. You couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. There was a thick, eerie darkness in the middle of the day. It wasn’t supposed to be dark at that time. The sun should have been high in the sky. As I was growing up hearing old time preachers say “The s-u-n refused to shine,” I imagined it was because the light of the world was fading. I envisioned a S-O-N set.

Even when the sun came back out, it remained dark and dreary in Mary Magdalene’s world.

Matthew and Mark tell us she was watching when Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had donated. That’s the last thing the Bible tells us she saw on Friday—the tortured body of her Deliverer and Teacher being buried.

Do you remember the television commercials for the anti-depressant drug Zoloff? In them, a little grey cloud follows people around. Perhaps life was in muted shades of grey for Mary. She couldn’t get to Jesus’ grave to grieve His death and burial on Saturday because it was the Sabbath Day. You know how slow time passes when you

can't get to the one you love. Magnify that feeling a million times to imagine what Mary Magdalene was experiencing. This was no temporary separation. Death had darkened her world.

We're not talking about puppy love or eros, romantic love. Jesus had changed her life. He had given her a purpose, and, *not just* her. She witnessed Him ushering men, women, girls, and boys into the kingdom of God. As one of the women who funded the earthly ministry of our Lord and Savior, Mary was there as Jesus changed the lives of hundreds and thousands. When they buried Him in that borrowed tomb, they buried the hopes and dreams of His followers as well. I tell you, the world wasn't just grey for Mary Magdalene.

Those 24 hours between Friday and Sunday must have felt like an eternity – and not Calvin Klein's romanticized kind. On Friday, she saw the One she left everything to follow beaten, battered, bruised, and buried. On Saturday, she could do nothing except remember the trauma from Friday and possibly prepare to visit his grave on Sunday. John tells us it's still dark outside when Mary makes her way to the tomb where she saw Jesus' battered body buried. Can you see her stumbling and tumbling through the darkness? It's dark outside. It's early Sunday morning, before dawn. It's dark inside. She's all alone. She's numb from the pain and the palpable hatred she witnessed. And she's desperately making her way to Jesus.

On Friday she saw them seal the tomb. On Sunday the stone has been rolled away. She can't believe her eyes. So, she rushes to tell Peter and John. They follow her back to the tomb and discover it's empty. They go home. Again, Mary is alone standing outside Jesus' borrowed tomb weeping.

In his *farewell discourse* Jesus predicted the men would scatter: each to his own home. That's why our focal text begins "*But, Mary!*" When the men scattered from our Savior, Mary went seeking Him. After Peter and John saw the empty tomb, they left. Mary lingered. There was a pull on her spirit to stay. She couldn't walk away.

Mariah Carey has a song about what I believe Mary must have been feeling: "Even though I try, I can't let go. Do you even realize the sorrow I have inside? Do you know the way it feels when all you have just dies?"

Mary was captivated by the revelation of the empty tomb. So, she stayed there when the others scattered. She lingered when Peter and John left. *This* is how she ends up being there alone for a personal and private encounter with Jesus. Mary waited on the Lord. We have to wait on the Lord if we want a personal encounter with Him. We can't just say our prayers and walk away. We have to sit in silence and let Him speak to us. Prayer is *two-way* communication. It's speaking *and* listening. It's having a little talk *with* Jesus not *to* Jesus.

The King James Version tells us that Mary was "*weeping*" as she stood there. That's a more accurate description. Crying can sometimes be low key. A tear may well up in your eye that you can blink away. A stubborn tear may roll down your cheek, but it's one you can wipe away. Crying isn't always intense. But, weeping. . .

weeping is far more forceful than crying. Weeping involves sobbing, heaving, snorting, and passionate crying. Mary is weeping because she's distraught. She had recently witnessed the crucifixion. And now Jesus' body is nowhere to be found!

Mary is weeping. She's sobbing. She's heaving. She's snorting. Her tears are flowing like a fountain. If Mary had simply been crying, she would have been all cried out by the time she talks with Jesus in verse 15. But the text tells us she's weeping in verse 11. The angels ask her why she's weeping in verse 13. And by the time Jesus speaks to her in verse 15, she's still weeping. I tell you, Mary is distraught.

She came looking for a dead body, so, she doesn't recognize the risen Savior. When she's unable to find what she came looking for, she turns around; she sees Jesus standing there, but she doesn't realize He's Jesus. Could it be that her tears have distorted her vision? Or is she so depressed that she has no discernment? Understandably, her heart is heavy. Her weeping isn't the problem. There's nothing wrong with grief. Expectation is what prevents Mary Magdalene from recognizing Jesus. She came to the garden alone looking for a dead body. She wasn't expecting to encounter a living Jesus. So, she sees what she believes. She thinks she's talking to the gardener.

That's what's wrong with some of us—we don't wake up in the morning *expecting* a miracle. So, we miss out on the presence and the power of the Lord in our lives. Too many times—just like Mary Magdalene—we *see what we believe*. We make up our minds about a situation, or a person, and that's *all* we see. We miss the truth that's right there in front of us because our suppositions are leading and guiding us. We would do well to trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and lean not to our own understanding. Things would go better for us if we were to acknowledge God and allow the Lord to direct our path. Proverbs 3:5 and 6 is a popular passage. Verse 7 cautions us to “*be not wise in [our] own eyes.*” We have to *stop believing what we see and start trusting what the Lord said*.

Jesus told His followers that He would rise on the third day, yet Mary isn't expecting to see Him alive and well. Let's not judge her too harshly. She wasn't expecting to see Him “*despised and rejected.*” She didn't fully understand that He “*became flesh and dwelt among us*” to be “*wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.*” She couldn't believe her eyes when she saw Him being taken from prison to judgment on Thursday night. She was in shock when she saw Him struggling to carry His cross up a hill called Golgotha. She never imagined He would be led to a place outside the city where criminals were crucified.

She kept expecting a miracle of intervention as the nails were driven through His hands and the nails were driven through His feet. I shudder to think about what Mary Magdalene was feeling when she finally realized that

Jesus, the One who had walked on the water;
Jesus, the One who fed 5,000 with 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread;
Jesus, the One who gave sight to the blind;

Jesus, the One who raised Lazarus from the dead; and
Jesus, the One who was celebrated the previous Sunday, the day we call
Palm Sunday,

was allowing Himself to be brought as a sheep to the slaughter right before her eyes. Mary's hopes and dreams were snuffed out when she and the women who sat on a hill not far away from the tomb saw Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled: *"He poured out his soul unto death. He was numbered with the transgressors. He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."* How could she possibly expect a miracle on Sunday morning?

When Jesus speaks to Mary Magdalene, He asks the strangest questions. I love the language in the King James Version: *"Why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?"* Jesus isn't asking Mary these questions for His information. He's hoping to give her revelation to remind her that He is risen from the dead just as He said. Jesus is speaking to Mary, but she doesn't recognize His voice. She's not expecting the Lord to speak to her anymore. So, she doesn't hear Him when He does.

How many times might you and I have missed the answers to our prayers because they didn't come when, where, or how we were expecting them? Don't ever give up hope. Today's text teaches us it's never too late for Jesus!

In Mary's mind, Jesus is the gardener, the one who takes care of the grounds at the cemetery. So she commands him: *"If you have moved Jesus' body, tell me where you put Him. And, I will go get Him myself."*

Isn't it funny that we conduct ourselves differently with people based on who we think they are?

I was talking with one of my preacher friends the other evening, and she was telling me that when she meets people in certain settings, they're very real with her. They let it all hang out. Then when they find out she's a preacher, they want to pull it all back in. They start saying, *"God is good. I used to go to church,"* stuff like that. So, it is with Mary. Supposing Jesus to be the gardener, she commands him.

Whenever we make decisions based solely upon suppositions, we end up with regrets. Consider the degree of difficulty if Mary ended up having to move a dead body by herself. What situations have you allowed your feelings to get you into? In the past, my temper has taken me farther than I intended to go a time or two. Impulse buying has left me with more bills than I've had money. Where are your feelings taking you these days?

Jesus knows Mary. He knows her sight is clouded by her suppositions. He knows she's talking crazy and not thinking straight. It's time to bring her back to reality. It's time for her to *stop* seeing what she believes. Instead, she needs to believe *Who* she is seeing and hearing.

Aren't you glad the Lord brings us back? He reveals truth to us. In spite of what we think or how we feel, the truth is eventually revealed.

Mary recognizes Jesus *when* He calls her by name. Was it like that for you? I know it was for me. I was raised in the church, I knew the stories in the Bible, but I didn't believe them. They weren't real for me, not until the Lord called me by my name, not until I encountered Christ for myself, not until I lingered in the presence of the Lord. As long as I was going to church because my mother made me, Jesus wasn't quite real to me. I didn't recognize Him until life caused me to weep and cry out to the Lord in prayer. Then He came and talked with me.

Jesus calls Mary's name! Immediately, she recognizes Him. She turns to Him and calls Him "Teacher." That's who Jesus is... isn't He? He's the One who teaches us all truth. The cure for all of our individual blindness is in the Word of God. When we don't know what to do, Jesus does. Whatever problem you're trying to solve, take it to the Lord in prayer. *If* you linger there, He will speak with you. He will call you by name and answer your prayer.

Can I try to make it plain for you? I already told you about the temper I used to let have me. One day, some years ago, something happened at work. I had already made up my mind about the person that offended me *and* the place where I worked. I didn't feel appreciated or valued. So, when the offense occurred, I was ready to quit. My emotions said "*You don't have to take this. Smack her in the face and leave this place!*" Little did I know... it was a set-up. It turned out that the one who offended me was envious of me. She knew I was getting a promotion. I didn't. Sometimes the enemy can see our potential before we can. Thank God I had recently heard my pastor preach about taking a prayer break before making decisions. I really couldn't afford to quit, so I prayed. The Lord said, "*You need not fight this battle. Stand still and hold your peace.*" It was a little late for me to hold my peace. While I didn't smack the woman with my hand, I had already given her *quite* a tongue lashing. Praise be to God, I didn't say or do anything *else* to aggravate the situation. The next day I was called into my boss's office. I was scared.

I *expected* to be reprimanded for my behavior the day before. Instead, I walked out as a Vice President with a significant pay raise and a larger office. My emotions didn't quite get the best of me. They took me farther than I should have gone the day before, but God's grace wiped my slate clean! Like Mary, I was first misguided by my emotions. Then the Lord brought me back and elevated me!

In today's text, Mary moves from *seeing* Jesus and not being able to identify Him to *hearing* Jesus and not being able to discern His voice. She doesn't know who Jesus is *until* He calls her by name. In her excitement, she grabs Him and clings to Him. As distraught as she was when she thought He was dead, she is now that overjoyed because He lives! At first, Mary Magdalene didn't *know* who Jesus was. Now, she does! And, she has no desire to leave His side. But she and Jesus *still* have work to do.

The shift in the narrative is exciting! Once Mary understands that Jesus is risen, the dialogue is no longer about His dead body. Her dark night of the soul is over. Though it was dark outside as she stumbled to the tomb, day is now dawning. The

grey clouds in Mary's world are departing. The s-u-n is rising as she speaks with the S-O-N of God! Birds begin to chirp as she realizes she's in conversation with the Risen Savior!

Jesus instructs Mary Magdalene to preach the gospel. He commissions her to tell the twelve men who walked and talked and ministered with Him about His ascension: *"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* Jesus makes Mary the apostle to the apostles! Standing where we stand on the other side of Resurrection Sunday morning, we can look back and declare that dark and dreary day for Mary Magdalene was a *"Good Friday"*! We can celebrate the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead early on Sunday morning! We can shout hallelujah because Mary discovered an empty tomb! We can declare with the angels that Christ is Risen! Just as Mary did, we can linger in the presence of the Lord until we see what He said has come to pass, hear Him call us by our names, and know the plans He has for us! There's an assignment with your name on it. You'll discover what it is if you dare to press your way into the presence of the Lord and linger there until you see it, until you hear it, until you know it for yourself!