

# John 20:11-18 - Easter

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting [gracepeacechurch.org](http://gracepeacechurch.org). All right.
- I'm excited to get to open God's Word with you. We've been going through Acts this, well, for really the last few months, and we've been taking a break this last week, and I've been looking at three words that kind of encapsulate what we see of Jesus through His Passion Week.
- And last Sunday, on Palm Sunday, we looked at blessed. Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord. What does it mean to be blessed with our King in His kingdom? On Friday night, we looked at darkness.
- What's the darkness that Jesus entered for us? And today, we look at one word that He said, Mary. And I'm excited to look at that. So if you'll look at John chapter 20, let me read this passage for us.
- [ 1 : 1 5 ]     But Mary stood weeping. This is Mary Magdalene. Stood weeping outside of the tomb. And as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb.
- And she saw two angels in white sitting where 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've taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.
- And having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she didn't 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 have carried Him away, tell me where you have lain Him, and I will take Him away.
- And Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, Rabboni, 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, My God and your God.
- [ 2 : 2 6 ]     Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that He said these things. To her. Amen. Remember, friends, this is God's Word, and He gives it to you because He loves you.
- And He wants you to know Him. So, I've been thinking about these three words, and coming to this word, Mary, is one of the most intimate, and I think beautiful portraits that we get of Jesus in the entire Bible.
- Is there anywhere where He is so tender and intimate with any person? What we see here is that it reveals Jesus' heart, that Jesus is more tender and gracious than you would imagine that He would be.

He's more compassionate. He knows you and me better than we think that He does. And we see that with Mary here. You know, for many people, I think Easter has become this time that is more about the facts that you are to believe about Jesus.

You know, Jesus has been risen. That is a fact. You should know that. You should believe that. But it's actually become less about, it's become more about a fact to believe, this abstract idea, than it is about a person to be known.

[ 3 : 50 ] The fundamental thing about Easter is not that you would believe the fact of the resurrection, but that you would know the resurrected Christ. That's why He's portrayed in this way here.

I wonder if you know anybody that's famous, like really famous. You know, like if you lived in Nashville, you might like be friends with Taylor Swift or something.

I'm not. I don't actually know anybody that's really famous personally. I do know one person. He's not really famous, but he's super rich. He's a billionaire, and he's a friend of ours.

He's, you know, we've known him for a long time. And, but when you, when you come into contact with people who are really famous, what you realize is that their public persona is often very different than what you recognize with them.

That when you begin to get to know them, things are different. In fact, when you begin to get to know them, there's a reciprocal kind of relationship that develops. You know them better. You know what's really going on when they're not in like famous mode.

[ 4 : 55 ] But they also begin to know you for who you are. So, while you don't know a famous person well, you might be intimidated by them, right? You may not say what you really think around them.

You might defer to them in all sorts of ways. But, if you actually get to know that person, what begins to happen is, you begin to, you begin to be honest. You can tell them stuff.

You know, you can, you can critique them in ways. You have a real relationship going. I think that that's a helpful image when you're thinking about what it means to know Jesus.

Not just to know about Him, but to know Him. Because when you get to know one of these people, you become changed by the interaction with them. You are both, you know them, and are known by them.

You know, the fact of the resurrection is interesting, but it does not change you. Knowing Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, actually changes you.

[ 5 : 55 ] Because you know Him in a new way, and you are known by Him. So, I want to take just a couple of minutes to look at Mary's interaction with Jesus here, to see what she sees here.

What she begins to know about Jesus, and what that means for us. So, what it means to know and be known by the risen Jesus. So, the first thing is that Mary knew comfort.

She knew a sense of comfort that she didn't have before. So, after looking into the tomb, she sees the angel sitting at the head and the foot of the little stone shelf.

We think that most of these tombs would have been kind of caves that would be hollowed out out of the rock, and then they would hollow out a little extra shelf where you would lay the body.

And that's where Jesus had been. Some sort of a shelf in the rock. And she sees the angels there. She's not afraid in this moment. John, the other Gospels talk about how the women who saw the angels were terrified, but John's emphasis is not that.

[ 7 : 01 ] She seems really deliberate. It would have been normal if she was afraid, but the angels, she's more overcome by her emotion of loss.

And the angels recognize that because both the angels and Jesus ask her the same question. Did you notice that? Why are you weeping?

And Jesus adds, what are you looking for? It's as though it wasn't a rebuke or a condemnation because in Mary's emotion, even the angels could see the burden, the overwhelming and crushing reality of death that we live in as human beings.

The crushing realities are there and they don't condemn Mary for her tears, for her emotion. In fact, they're dignifying it.

It's good for you to weep because this world is not what it's supposed to be. We're not supposed to die like that. In fact, it was only the approach of the risen Jesus that gives her any comfort.

[ 8 : 08 ] Jesus approaches. It kind of seems like he appears out of the mist of the garden somewhere and he comes up behind her. She sees him, but she didn't recognize him.

And I don't know why she didn't recognize him. Maybe it was still a little bit dark. Maybe she was just overcome with emotion. Maybe she just didn't expect a man who was dead to be walking around.

And she just didn't notice him until he spoke to her. In fact, what it says is that she thought he was the gardener. Isn't that kind of a provocative idea? Why did she think he was the gardener?

Was he wearing overalls? You know, was he like, was he holding like some tulips or something? You know, Easter lilies he's walking around with? You know, what does he do? What does he assume was? On his shoulders, the rest of humanity is going to find their life.

And in that moment, that moment of his incredible victory, he's talking to Mary. He's seeing her need.

[ 9 : 12 ] He's seeing her despair. Her living under this state of sin and misery and death that all of us live in. And at the very place of her most deep pain, that's where he shows up with his new redemptive life.

I don't know that Mary picked up on the gardener thing. Maybe that was just John. Maybe years later, when Mary Magdalene was telling John about this as he was writing his gospel, maybe he said to her, well, what did you see when Jesus came?

And she was like, well, I didn't notice him. I just didn't recognize him. I thought he was a gardener. And maybe John was like, yep, gardener. Jesus comes and meets her in the deepest place of her pain.

You know, if you have children, there are times that your children might be scared or frightened about something. And there is a temptation to just say, it's no big deal.

I'm here. It's no big deal. Go back to your room. Go back to your bed. There's a very big difference, however, between telling them it's going to be okay and walking them, holding their hand, walking them back to their room and laying down in their bed with them until they fall back asleep.

[ 10 : 30 ] What Jesus is doing is he's meeting Mary in the very place of her deepest distress and he's walking her to the place of comfort.

He's doing something about her pain. For Mary to be comforted by Jesus is to show us that God has entered in to do something concrete about our loss.

Okay, that's the first thing. Jesus knew, Mary knew comfort from him. Second thing is that Jesus knew her name.

Mary heard her name spoken. Jesus didn't like play with her or keep her waiting. He wasn't trying to be difficult. He reveals who he was very quickly.

He spoke clearly and powerfully that simple word Mary. Frederick Dale Bruner is a Bible scholar that I love and he says that this was the shortest sermon in the Bible. The shortest sermon in the Bible.

[ 11 : 36 ] What he was doing was, you remember back in John chapter 10 earlier in this book, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd, the good shepherd. And he says this, that the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out.

Jesus was putting that into practice. By using her name, he was simply opening her eyes to an entirely new world. Mary.

I am so struck by the intimacy of that moment. That Mary was so deeply known by Jesus. It wasn't just a word of comfort in her despair.

It was a word of transformation. That something about the world was fundamentally different as soon as he said that. It's worth me reading a long quote from Bruner for you.

Let me read just some of this. When he spoke and she turned around, in the one or two seconds this turn took, I imagine the world shifting ever so slightly on its axis.

[ 12 : 40 ] And at about the turns, one second midpoint trajectory, history too, moved almost imperceptibly from B.C. to A.D.

A second before this turn, there is a woman in the deepest human despair of agonizing, in the agonizing presence of unconquerable death. A second after the beginning of this turn, there is a woman in the deepest possible human elation, in the presence of the death-conquering central figure of history.

The world changed in that one word. Isn't that amazing? I said on Friday that Jesus entered into the darkness of alienation and despair in order to rescue us from the darkness, that we would not sink down in the mire of darkness, that we would not be, that we would not live forever in the darkness of alienation.

Jesus was rejected. His prayers received only silence from the Father. But what Mary discovered is that in the darkness of that morning, in the absence of Jesus' body, His presence was actually there in a new way.

Something new was being born. In the place of her despair, Jesus was speaking life into it. I wonder, you know, I wonder if some of you just kind of have this sense, you know, you play around with faith.

[ 14 : 15 ] You know the fact of the resurrection, but if you really dug underneath, what you really think is that God has already left you, that there's just silence.

When you pray, there's just nothing, nobody's hearing it. It's just you talking into the air. Maybe that you think God has left because you're so sinful.

You know, you've done so many bad things that you're ashamed about. Or you think that your faith is so fickle and up and down. Or your doubts, they're so strong and they come up so much.

Or your obedience is so weak. You don't do the things that you want to do. You do the things you don't want to do. What you need to see here is that Jesus speaks your name in the same way He speaks the name of Mary.

God's presence in your life is not limited to your awareness of His presence in your life. Whether or not you see and feel the presence of the risen Christ, He is present there.

[ 15 : 27 ] He is calling you out. He is making Himself known to you. Your job is simply to listen.

To listen for what He is already doing. Okay. Mary knew comfort from Jesus.

She knew her name from Jesus. But she also heard a not yet from Jesus. So after all of that, Mary understandably rushes up and hugs Jesus.

Look at verse 17 here. 17, Jesus said, Don't cling to me. Do not cling to me. That means that she had run up and had grabbed a hold of Him and wasn't letting go.

Jesus didn't push her away. He let her hold on. And then after a time said, Okay, you need to let go now. That she couldn't hold on to Him forever.

[ 16 : 26 ] He said, I have not yet ascended. Now there's a little bit of confusion because if you've read older Bibles, there's some older English translations that mistranslate the verb here.

And it makes it sound like Jesus is giving her a command that sounds like don't touch me. You may have read old Bibles that have that kind of language there. But that's not actually what the translation should be.

The translation is, don't hold on to me and keep holding on to me. Like you've grabbed a hold like you're holding on for dear life, but that's not what you're doing. What Jesus is saying is, I know that you're holding on.

I know that you're elated, but I have something more for you to do. You can't just stay right here in this moment of intimacy, in this moment of life. I know you love this right here, but you have to let go because I'm going to send you somewhere else.

And I find that to be really comforting because I don't know about you, but I've been a Christian a while and I've had moments where I've felt the intimacy of the presence of God.

[ 17 : 29 ] I felt like God has been near to me. But that moment is fleeting. It goes away. I'd love to recapture that sometimes, but I just kind of can't recapture that.

And I feel like there's sometimes God is saying, well, you know, not yet. I'm going to give you a taste of it, but you're not going to have the fullness yet. He says, I have not yet ascended to the Father.

His work is not done. What I tried to communicate to our children just a moment ago is that the whole of Jesus' story has to be brought together. It begins with His incarnation through His crucifixion and His resurrection and His ascension that all of it goes together.

And Jesus is in the middle of the story here. And He's saying, look, you're not going to find everything that you want right here in this moment of intimacy. There's going to be times of joy, but there's also going to be more work to do.

You see, the not yet of this moment, while some people may feel that as a rejection or may feel ashamed that like, why can't I get back to the fire that I had in my belly when I was, you know, in college and I really loved Jesus?

[ 18 : 40 ] Or when I first became a Christian, you know, in my 20s. And what Jesus is saying here is that that not yet might be an invitation to a deeper intimacy.

Okay, so Mary knew comfort. She knew her name. She knew not yet, but she also had a new, she knew a new mission. So Jesus told her, go and tell my brothers.

There's something really beautiful about this. Did you notice this? He says, I'm sending you to my brothers and I want them to know that I'm going back to my father and their father.

My God and their God. There's this incredible, up until this point, Jesus has been the teacher, they the disciples. He's been the leader, them the followers. But here he's bringing them in in this communal way.

I want you to know that you're part of the household now. I've adopted you into my family. He is our elder brother. And there's an intimacy in that.

[ 19 : 46 ] Not only is Jesus just condescending to Mary, but he's bringing Mary into this bigger sense of their connection together. And she's sending him out.

She had a mission. Mary was the messenger of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene was the first missionary of the church. Isn't that interesting?

Now, we do have some confusion about who Mary Magdalene was. Some people, you know, think she is Mary of Bethany, who was sisters of Martha and of Lazarus.

That's probably who she was. She may be some unknown other Mary, but then there are other people in popular discourse, you know, Dan Brown's, The Da Vinci Code, who think that Mary was this, is the woman who was a sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet.

We don't think it's that woman. And actually, they've built this whole lore on top of that, that Mary Magdalene was this former prostitute, and she got saved by Jesus, and then they fell in love, and then they got married, and they had children before Jesus' resurrection.

[ 20 : 51 ] All of that is total hogwash. Total hogwash. Makes for a great story, but it's not reality. Mary was a pillar of the church. In fact, her name Magdalene, we think that that's actually not a place, but it's a moniker.

It means tower. We think that they called her Mary Magdalene because she was a towering figure in the early church. That she was a pillar of this early group in the early days of the church.

She was the first messenger of the resurrection. She had an incredibly important role to play. You see, this just goes back to what I said at the beginning.

Easter is not fundamentally a fact to be believed. It is that, but it is more. It is a person to be known. You can be around the church your entire life and never have a sense of knowing Jesus.

What does it look like to know Jesus? What would that look like for you if you've been around Christianity your whole life, but for you, you've never had any sort of an intimate, deep understanding of Him?

[ 22 : 07 ] Well, I saw, I read an example of this that I thought was really powerful. Diane Langberg, you may have heard her. We occasionally will have a book of hers on our book table. She's a therapist and is kind of an expert in trauma.

And so, I've actually worked with her on some church situations before and she gets asked to kind of travel around to all sorts of places to consult in traumatic settings.

And so, she went to Rwanda, which had the great genocide, there great meaning large, not good, which had this genocide in 1994. If you don't know much about that, the Rwandan genocide, it was 100 days in the summer of 1994 where the Hutu majority tribe, who were intermixed with the Tutsi minority, they were neighbors, they went to church together, they had businesses together, many of them were intermarried, and the Hutus went on a rampage slaughtering Tutsis.

They killed at least 500,000 people over the course of 100 days. Bodies everywhere, most of that killing done with machetes. It's been one of the most awful genocides that we've seen, and Diane Langberg has been invited in to work with some of the survivors, or she did years ago, and she told the story of one woman that she was working with, and here's what this woman said after working with Diane for a while.

She said this, I saw only evil. I no longer believed God to be good. The church was not a sanctuary for me and my family.

[ 23 : 51 ] It was a cemetery. But when you came, you listened, and you knew my broken heart. And now I think I can believe that God, too, is listening and knows my pain and will be my, and will be my sanctuary.

You see, what Jesus is doing is he's entering in to the deepest places of pain and loss. The fundamental problem with most people who believe the facts about Easter but who do not know Jesus is they are constantly trying to keep the worst parts of them away from Jesus.

Don't come to these deep places in me, my failures and my loss and my shame. Come to the places where I can show you how great I am. But that is not why Jesus came.

Jesus came to enter into the darkness of our world in such a powerful way that he would redeem it from the inside out. You cannot present yourself to be good enough for Jesus.

You have to be known by him in those places of greatest vulnerability. You have to be comforted by him.

[ 25 : 20 ] You have to hear your name from him. Sometimes that means you are going to hear a not yet and be sent on a different kind of mission than you thought you might. It doesn't solve all of your problems overnight but to be known by him it means being like Mary.

Being known in such a way that it opens up an entirely new world of possibility for you. There is that famous quote, if Christ has been raised nothing else matters.

If Christ has been raised nothing else about my life and my sin matters. Nothing else can touch the fact of his resurrection. And if Christ has not been raised well then nothing else matters.

See to know Jesus and to be brought into a vital and intimate relationship with the risen Christ Christ is to be made a brother, a sister with him to be brought into his family to be brought into the depths of knowing him.

It's not based on the strength of your faith. It's not based on your confidence. It's not based on your anything. It's based upon the reality of Christ and who he is as the risen savior.

[ 26 : 36 ] And so the only real question for us on Easter is will we listen and know this Christ?

That's the question for you and for me. Let's let that sit with us as we turn to the Lord's table because as we turn to the Lord's table the whole reason why we come to communion is to know Jesus more.

You get the chance to put into action the question that I just asked you. Do you want to know him by faith? Amen.

Let me pray for us. Father, would you reveal Christ to us more and more today? Would you give us the comfort that he provides? Would you help us to hear our name spoken on his lips?

Would you give us that intimacy of knowing him and being sent on mission with him? We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.