

From Fear to Faith

Text: John 20:11-18, 19–31

Let's look at that again! On early Resurrection Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb located near the place of crucifixion just outside the City walls. Not expecting a miracle, but out of love, grief, and loyalty she went just to honor Him. (John 20:1) And when she got there, the stone had been rolled away from Jesus' tomb. Her first thought wasn't resurrection — it was *"someone has taken His body!"* She ran to a house in Jerusalem where Peter and John were hiding together, probably in the same upper room where they had the Last Supper with Jesus and told them: *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they put Him!"* Peter and John ran to the tomb. John got there first. He looked in and saw the linen strips that had been wrapped around Jesus' body just laying there. — But he didn't go in. Peter got and there and went straight in. He saw the linen strips, and the folded face cloth separate from the other cloths as we learned about last week. They saw the empty tomb. But verse 9 says: *"They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."* And that sets the stage for something deeply personal in the next few verses. Peter and John left Mary, who had followed them, and she remained at the tomb. While she stood outside Jesus' tomb weeping, she looked inside and saw two angels in white, sitting where Jesus' body had been placed. They asked her why she was crying. She said, *"They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him."* When she turned around, she saw Jesus, but did not recognize Him at first. She thought He was the gardener. He asked her why she was weeping. Who was she looking for? She begged Him for the body of Jesus. Then, Jesus simply said her name: *"Mary."* With that, everything changed! She recognized not a gardener, but Jesus! Her sorrow turned to joy. And her confusion cleared. Jesus told her not to cling to Him as He had not yet ascended to the Father. And He instructed her to go tell the disciples that He is ascending to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God. You see, after Jesus' resurrection He didn't go and appear first to kings, priests, or powerful people. He appeared first to a woman! And that's why this is so significant! It broke customs. In the 1st century, a woman's testimony wasn't even accepted in court! Yet, Jesus trusted the greatest testimony in history to a woman! Women always had a vital place in God's plan. And still do! It's radical grace. It shows the upside-down nature of God's Kingdom. God doesn't choose the most powerful or prominent. He chooses the humble. The faithful. The outcast. The overlooked. And Mary Magdalene became the *"apostle to the apostles"* — the first to carry the Good News. It speaks to healing and change. Luke 8:2 tells us that certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities followed Jesus. Among them was Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had departed. And there was Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna which shows the personal relationship between Jesus and His followers, emphasizing the significance of His resurrection. It highlights the role these women had in Jesus' ministry and their gratitude for the healing they received. Healing transformed Mary's life and led her to become a devoted follower of Jesus. Her story highlights the importance of freedom through Jesus. And it teaches that by faith in Him, anyone can achieve a new life. Her story reminds us of those who are forgiven much, love much! Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Jesus. And she's the key to the story of His resurrection. She wasn't chosen randomly. She had been healed by Jesus whom she loved deeply. And she stayed when others ran. Later, they became courageous witnesses which shows, no one is too far gone for Jesus to redeem. Because when Jesus sets you free, He gives you a new identity. And a mission. Sometimes, the most powerful witnesses are those who have been the most deeply hurt. And Mary's life is a living testimony of the radical grace and promise of hope found in Jesus. She was one of the many women who were faithful disciples and followed Him throughout His ministry. Often, more faithfully than some of the men. She supported His ministry. She was present during Jesus' crucifixion. She watched with grief at the cross. She refused to run away. (John 19:25) She stayed near Jesus in death when others had fled. And at that moment, standing before the empty tomb, her tear-filled eyes were opened. She recognized Jesus and exclaimed, *"Rabboni!"* (which means Teacher). But Jesus told her not to hold on to Him. He had not yet ascended to the Father, (John 20:17) which was deeply meaningful. He was referring to the moment — still to come — when He would return in full glory to Heaven and sit at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 1:9–11). His resurrection from the dead had happened. But His Ascension had not! His return to Heaven was yet to come. His work on earth wasn't finished. — Remember the folded linen cloth Jesus left in the tomb? His Ascension would complete His mission. *"Do not hold on to Me... I have not yet ascended"* tells us Jesus' story didn't stop at the empty tomb. The resurrection is powerful. It points to the full victory when He was glorified and ascended to heaven. Then He sent the Holy Spirit so we could walk with Him forever. So, He gave Mary a message: *"Go to My brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father. To My God and your God.'"* She did! And when she told the eleven disciples, *"I have seen the Lord!"* she became the first preacher of the resurrection — sent by Jesus Himself! Commissioned by her resurrected Lord her message wasn't a theological essay — it was simple, life-changing truth: *"I have seen the Lord!"* And that should be every Christian's witness — not knowing everything but testifying *"He's alive. He changed everything. I've met Him."* And where were the disciples? They were hiding behind locked doors in Jerusalem in the same upper room where they had the Last Supper with Jesus. Where they later gathered to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit. Hearts afraid. Trembling. The resurrection had happened — but the news hadn't reached them, yet. So, fear was louder than faith. The disciples were locked in their fear because they

had just experienced shock and turmoil. Their Teacher had been arrested, tortured, crucified, and buried. Their hopes of a kingdom seemed shattered. They were hoping for a political and national kingdom — one where Messiah Jesus would overthrow Roman rule. Israel would be restored to its former glory like in King David's time. And Messiah would reign as King on Earth bringing justice, peace, and power to His people. But He was arrested and killed! And they feared they were next. That the same authorities would come for them. So, they locked the door. Not just a physical door to a room. But the door to their hearts. They were locked in fear, confusion, and doubt. Sound familiar? Fear can make you anxious about your future. Confusion can cloud your vision of what's true. Fear can make you question your worth, your purpose. Even your faith. When fear dominates, it's hard to hear God's voice. You might start thinking *"God has forgotten me," "This is the end,"* or *"There's no way out!"* But Jesus didn't wait until the disciples had it all figured out. He didn't wait until they were praying or praising. He walked right through a closed door into the middle of their fear *"and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'"* It wasn't just a casual *"hello."* It was the peace they desperately needed in their storm of fear. He didn't ask them, *"Why are you hiding?"* He didn't scold them. He met them right where they were — in fear! And we all have been there! Locked in rooms like that — places where fear keeps you stuck! Fear of failure. Fear of the future. Fear of not being good enough. But that's when Jesus comes and says, *"Peace be with you."* You don't have to have it all together. He meets you right where you are! And His presence calms storms. The room was locked. Threats were real. But Jesus' presence changed everything. And that's what peace is. It's not a calm *situation*. It's a calm *soul*. Because Jesus is near. He doesn't remove fear by removing the danger. He removes fear by bringing Himself into your room. When you wait to come to Jesus until you feel strong enough or faithful enough, Jesus will enter right into your locked-up places. He's not afraid of your fear. You are! And He brings peace to it. And notice what happened after Jesus proclaimed peace. He showed them His hands. His side — proof love defeated death. The disciples went from hiding to happiness. And then He gave them a mission empowered by the Holy Spirit. *"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* ²² *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* Jesus was giving them the authority to proclaim the Gospel message which includes forgiveness. To recognize genuine repentance. To announce forgiveness based on whether people accepted or rejected Jesus. Think of it like this: When someone believed the Gospel and repented, the disciples could say, *"Your sins are forgiven through Christ."* When someone rejected the Gospel, they could say, *"Your sins are not forgiven — you remain in them."* Fear closed the door. But peace opened their hearts. And Jesus didn't just appear — He showed His scars. However, Thomas wasn't there the first time Jesus appeared. He's called "Doubting Thomas." But maybe he should be called "Honest Thomas." He wanted what the others already had. And what did Jesus do? He didn't shame Thomas. He invited him to: *"Touch. See. AND Believe."* And when Thomas did, Thomas responded with one of the clearest confessions of faith in the whole Bible: *"My Lord and my God!"* You see, faith isn't just the absence of doubt. Faith is choosing to trust Jesus. Even if you have questions. And Jesus is patient. He invites you to see, to seek, to believe. This echoes Genesis 2:7 when God breathed life into Adam. God personally gave Adam life by breathing His own breath into him. *"He breathed on him and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"* Here, Jesus was breathing new creation into His disciples. It was more than a visit. It was a commissioning. He gave them peace. He gave them proof. And He gave them power to live as resurrection people. They weren't just witnesses to the resurrection. They had become ambassadors of it! And that's you and me. *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Jesus looked across time and saw the millions — the billions — who would believe without touching His scars. And He called us blessed. *"These are written so that you may believe... and by believing, have life in His name."* Life in His name means forgiveness, peace, purpose, and eternal hope — starting now, and lasting forever. Like Mary, we all go through times of confusion, grief, or spiritual fog. But the risen Jesus still speaks our name. Still opens our eyes. And still sends us out to tell others *"He is alive. I have seen the Lord."* Whether in moments of worship, Scripture, prayer, or everyday grace — when you encounter the risen Christ, you are forever changed! Now, have you seen the Lord? Maybe not with your eyes. But in your heart? In moments of peace. Answered prayer. Forgiveness. Or conversion? Then, you have a story to tell; like Mary standing by an empty tomb crying, the disciples behind locked doors full of fear, and Thomas, *"My Lord and my God!"* But after meeting the risen Jesus, they all became bold, joyful, Spirit-filled witnesses. Go tell the story like Mary, *"I have seen the Lord!"* The invitation today is the same: Come. See the scars. Believe. And have life in His name. And peace be with you. Let us pray:

Risen Jesus, we thank You for meeting us in our fear, in our doubt, and in our weakness. Thank You for Your peace, for Your patience, and for the power of Your Spirit. Help us to believe, to trust, to testify and to live as people of the resurrection, boldly and joyfully in Your name, Amen.