

0283
Something new
John 20:10-18

Note

Happy Mother's day!

Text

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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 laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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, to my God and your God.' " ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Prayer

Introduction

Obviously the most striking thing about this passage is that Mary Magdalene sees the risen Jesus on the first Easter. That's what it's all about.

But that doesn't mean that that's all there is to this passage.

As the Apostle John records this first sighting of the risen Lord, he doesn't give us extreme language and drama. He records things very matter of factly and with subtlety which can make it easy to miss some powerful allusions that John is making to the Old Testament.

Jesus is risen and that is the most important thing that mankind can know. But this passage is also pointing back to the ways in which Jesus has fulfilled the Old

Testament. To understand that makes this a truly awe inspiring and edifying passage from God's Word.

Bridge

So the plan this morning is to look at the gospel past, present, and future. Technically, we'll look at the gospel past, future, and then present because that's the order of events in our passage.

And the main idea of this section is that Jesus lives and promises eternal life because he fulfills an eternal plan.

The gospel Past

We begin in the past.

The garden

And I'll go all the way back to the fall of humanity and man's expulsion from the garden in Genesis 3:23-24:

the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Adam and Eve are sent out of the garden and Genesis mentions that cherubim, angelic beings, were given charge to guard the garden. Cherubim are mentioned about 100 times in the Old Testament and their function is to guard the holy places of God¹.

They guard the garden which houses the tree of life.

The tabernacle

Fast forward to when the Israelites had been freed from slavery in Egypt.

The last quarter of the Book of Exodus is giving instructions for the tabernacle which was a tent like structure which was portable and which the Israelites would take with them during their Exodus wanderings. The tabernacle represented God's presence with his people.

God gives very specific instructions for the tabernacle. With what it represented, the tabernacle was not something meant to just haphazardly built. It was a sacred place.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 817.

The first aspect of the tabernacle which was described was the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus 25.

The Ark of the Covenant was a wooden rectangular box which measured about 4 feet by 3 feet by 4 feet high.

But it also had instructions for intricate ornamentation. The top of it was to be made from gold, which was called the mercy seat. Now when we think “seat,” I think we tend to imagine a chair. I don’t think that’s helpful. Think of mercy seat more in terms of it being a symbol for the seat of God’s power.

Sometimes Washington D.C. will be referred to as the seat of government, or the seat of our democracy.

That’s a more helpful way to think of the mercy seat.
It’s the seat of the divine mercy.

Quoting now from Exodus 25:17-19:

¹⁷ “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ¹⁸ And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. ¹⁹ Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end.

(Modern rendering)

So the mercy seat covered the ark and they were commanded to design two golden cherubim. Certainly the golden cherubim were a symbol of the angels who guarded the place of God where God’s glorious presence dwelled.

To quote from Philip Ryken talking about the mercy seat:

“Its cover was a three-dimensional picture of a scene from Heaven, where God is surrounded by his holy angels. The cherubim on the ark represented the burning angels beneath God’s throne².”

The writer of Hebrews talked about the contents of the ark of the covenant and also pointed to the cherubim in Hebrews 9:4-5:

⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.

² Id, 818.

So to recap, you have the ark of the covenant which was inside the tabernacle. Atop the ark was the mercy seat with the two golden cherubim.

Now the ark of the covenant was not just inside the tabernacle, but inside a special part of the tabernacle which was called the most holy place or the holy of holies.

Exodus 26:33-34 talks of the separating off of the holy place from the most holy place by a veil:

³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. ³⁴ You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place.

It is where Moses would go to hear from the Lord. It was also the place where later high priests would go to make sacrifices.

Day of atonement

Now the other major Old Testament passage which deals with the most holy place which housed the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat is Leviticus 16 which talks about the priestly functions on the annual day of atonement. That was the only time the high priest would go into the most holy place. Once a year to offer a sacrifice for the people.

Among other activities on the Day of Atonement, a priest would select two goats. One would be released which was a symbol of God taking away our sin. The other goat was sacrificed. This was a symbol of the cost of sin and our need for atonement.

Inside the most holy place, the priest also would take the blood of a bull who had been sacrificed and make an atonement for his own sins before he could atone for the sins of the people.

I don't have a slide but Leviticus 16:14:

¹⁴ And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

Next the priest, would take the blood of the goat who had been sacrificed and sprinkle its blood on the mercy seat.

Quoting from Leviticus 16:15-16:

¹⁵ "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ Thus he shall

make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins.

So on that one day of the year, the blood would cover the mercy seat as a symbol of the atonement which the people of God needed.

The gospel points to Jesus as being the one who is truly worthy to be sacrificed for our sins. His blood was shed for our sins. His life was given for our sins so that we could be freed. He died so that we could have life.

The tomb

With that, we come to John 20.

On Easter, I talked about John and Peter being witnesses to the empty tomb. John 20:8 says that John saw and believed. But they still had not seen the risen Lord.

John 20:10 says:

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

That takes them away from the tomb and we again see Mary Magdalene return. In John 20:1, she had discovered the empty tomb and now she's come back.

Beginning in our passage. Verses 11-12:

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

Everything we've been talking about points to these two verses.

As two cherubim had been made out of gold to form the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant which sat inside the most holy place where only the priest could enter, on the first Easter, Mary looks into the empty tomb to see two angels who are sitting where the body of Jesus had had lain.

She's seeing the true mercy seat.

The most holy place was a sacred place, which was separated off by a curtain. When Jesus was buried, the tomb had been sealed by a large rock, the face of Jesus had been covered with a cloth face covering.

But the stone has been removed. In the earlier part of John 20, we see the face covering of Jesus in the tomb.

John 20:6-7:

⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

When Jesus died, Matthew 27:51 says the veil of the temple was torn in two.

All of that points to what Jesus has accomplished. He now allows us to enter the holy place because Jesus is the true high priest who enters and gives us entrance.

Hebrews 4:14-16 says:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

He is the true priest.

He is the true sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:10-10 says:

by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

In Exodus 40, there is a dramatic scene where the glory of the Lord enters the tabernacle:

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle

And Mary is about to behold the glory of the risen Jesus.

The tabernacle was a holy place. But Jesus is the true tabernacle.

In John 1:14, the apostle writes of Jesus when he says:

the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

When we were preaching in John 1, we made the point of saying that in the Greek, the word for “dwelt” really means something more along the lines of tabernacled or pitched a tent among us.

The tabernacle represented the presence and glory of God with his people. Jesus is the presence and glory of God with his people.

And so you have these themes of sacrifice, the mercy seat, the most holy place, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the glory of God and Mary is seeing this convergence of all of these themes as she looks inside the empty tomb.

But she doesn't realize it. That's a pretty overwhelming sight to behold and a lot of complex ideas to put together.

But in hindsight, you can see all of the meaning in what Mary witnessed in the moments leading up to her witnessing the risen Lord.

The two angels speak to her.

Angels are speaking to her and her grief over the crucifixion is so strong and so powerful that the significance of angels speaking to her is lost on Mary.

Verse 13:

¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

As Mary had done earlier in John 20, she seems to think that grave robbers had raided the tomb.

She is looking at the true mercy seat and can't see the good news in that.

The empty tomb is the ark of the new covenant.

And that's a theme we start to see in this passage. That Jesus brings something better than the old covenant because he is God with us, because he is the final sacrifice, because he is the great high priest, because his blood is the blood that truly takes away our sins.

The gospel future

Continuing in our passage, we look forward. And it matters that he look forward because it is through the work that Christ has done in satisfying the commands of the Old Testament that we have a future with Christ.

As Mary grieves, her sorrow is about to be turned to joy.

Surprises

We had garage sales last week. I feel like every year, you'll see a few stories about someone who buys an item at a garage sale or a thrift store or they find it in an attic and ends up being a million dollar painting.

I read a story about a family that found a bowl at a garage sale and they thought it looked nice and so they sat in their home as a decoration

Eventually they had it examined and this bowl that they had bought for \$3 was actually over 1,000 years old and dated to the Song Dynasty in China.

It auctioned for \$2.2 million.

I enjoy watching clips from the antique's road show where a person will have an item that they like but that they never imagined was something extraordinary or rare and you see the look of surprise when they discover it's actually of great value.

And if you're like me, you always think "why can't I ever find one of those."

But in Christ, we have something of true value and Mary was about to receive the surprise of all of human history. In the face of grief and the loss of her beloved friend and teacher, she would be the first person to see the risen Lord.

Verse 14:

¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

So Jesus is behind Mary but she doesn't know it.

Gardens

Before we talk about Mary seeing the risen Lord, I want to take us back for a moment to the arrest of Jesus.

John chapter 18:1-4:

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

At the beginning of the arrest, death, resurrection narrative, John introduces us to a garden. And if you remember when we first talked about this a couple months ago, I argued that this is thematic and theological.

Only John's gospel refers to the place of Jesus' arrest as a garden. And the point is that John is pointing to the new creation that Jesus is bringing.

We also see a garden associated with the burial of Jesus in John 19.

John 19:40-41:

⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

That's how chapter 19 ends, by the way. The next verse in John is Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb on Easter.

Jesus is arrested in a garden and he's buried in a garden.

And as a distraught Mary looks into the tomb:

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Whom are you seeking?

It's the same question he asks the people who had come to arrest him in chapter 18.

Here the risen Jesus will ask the same thing to Mary.

Whom are you seeking?

Who are you looking for?

I'll ask the same question to you.

Who are you seeking?

What kind of savior do you expect? Again many like to talk about God as if he's basically what they want him to be. It's a theology of preference like ordering a la carte. I want a savior who loves, but not one who judges. I want a savior who blesses but not one who expects. I want a savior who makes me happy, but I don't care so much about a savior who makes me holy. I want a savior who does what I want but who doesn't

really disrupt my life too much. I want the good stuff but everything else, maybe I'll take that on the side.

Jesus is here to save the whole person. Jesus is here to be the Lord and savior of your whole life.

And then the second part of verse 15 shows Mary's response where it says::

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

I love that. Supposing him to be the gardener.

Arrested in a garden, buried in a garden, and first seen resurrected in the garden.

When we talked about John 18, I said, "the first garden was a perfect place where humanity brought on death because of sin. In this second garden, a perfect Jesus will bring eternal life because he will suffer the consequences of sin and experience death. The first garden was the place where humanity fell. The second garden is the place where Jesus redeems³."

Jesus is the gardener because he's the one who takes us back to the garden.

In John 15, Jesus said:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

He is the vine that nourishes, that sustains, that nurtures our growth and life.

And he is the gardener who tends to a new garden.

In the final chapter of the Bible in Revelation 22, it describes the river of life in the New Jerusalem.

It's a return to an Edenic setting in its language.

Revelation 22:1-5:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face,

³ Benner, Joshua Sermon "the New Garden." 13 March 2022.

and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

That is the hope that we have through Christ because we have a savior who is risen and who lives.

And he is taking us back to the garden.
Jesus lives and promises eternal life because he fulfills an eternal plan.

The gospel present
We come to our third point.

We've looked at the gospel past and future.

But what does it mean for us today.

We return to our passage.

Mary still thinks she's talking to the gardener.

Verse 16:

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

I can only speak for myself, but I again find it interesting how understated this is.

No thunder and flashes of lightning and fireworks.

It's rare that I get choked up but I was really struck when writing this sermon of just the beautiful simplicity of the moment. That was all it took. Him to call her by her name, and in an instant, the grief and sorrow disappear and she sees the risen Christ.

In John 10, the passage where Jesus says **I am the good shepherd**, he says in John 10:3-4:

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Jesus calls us by name, he knows us by name. We have a personal savior.

He knows us. He knows our sins and he offers forgiveness anyway. He knows us at our worst, and he loves us anyway.

Mary turns to Jesus and she too responds with one word. Rabboni. John says that that word means teacher. Specifically, it means teacher in Aramaic.

Certainly Jesus is that.

But the risen Jesus is so much more than simply a teacher. He's a savior.

Verse 17:

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father;

D.A. Carson calls this verses one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament⁴.

Why does he tell Mary not to cling to him?

That seems odd.

And what does that command have to do with his ascension to the Father?

People touch Jesus all the time during his ministry. A woman wipes his feet with her hair, he washes the feet of the disciples, he touches lepers to heal them, he touches the eyes of a man born blind, and in this same chapter - John 20 - he'll tell doubting Thomas to touch the holes in his hands.

Why does he tell Mary to back off?

I'll point to three reasons.

First, in this moment when Mary is so overjoyed to see that Jesus has risen from the dead, he's actually pointing to a bigger picture. She's so relieved and thankful that he's alive but Jesus is saying, in effect, that the purposes for his ministry and ascension are so much bigger than this moment of being in close proximity to his physical presence.

Second, Grant Osborne suggests that Jesus is pointing forward to the new age. Mary had seen the risen Jesus and addressed him as "teacher," but he is more than that now⁵. He is Lord and savior and the command not to cling to him is meant to instruct her not to cling to the previous work of Christ but that he's pointing forward to a new relationship with the people of God as Jesus ascends to the father will he will rule and reign as Lord and savior over his church by the sending of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 641–642.

⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *John: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer et al., Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 463.

In Jesus telling her not to cling to him, that can seem cold or distant but he's not giving less of himself. He's giving more of himself in a relationship with Jesus and knowledge of Jesus.

Third, he tells her not to cling to him because there's work to do.

Second part of verse 17:

but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

Jesus is pointing to a new relationship we now have with him because of the resurrection. He calls the disciples his brothers. First time he says that in this gospel. And he refers to God as their father.

It's because Jesus is the true son of the Father that we too can be sons and daughters of God and brothers of Christ.

That's what the gospel means today. It means a new way of relating to God. In Romans 8, Paul will talk about how we are adopted through Christ.

And that new relationship is possible because on the first Easter, the tomb was empty. Jesus ascension came 40 days after the resurrection. But between Easter and the ascension, he was appearing and preparing his disciples.

So from this passage, what does the gospel mean for us today? I'll focus on two things. The new relationship we have with God. And a new purpose that we have because Christ is risen from the dead.

Verse 18:

"¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Conclusion

Mary is the first person to see the risen Jesus and as she leaves to find the disciples, she will also become the first person to share the good news that Jesus is risen and lives.

I think of how much of a struggle it so often is for us to talk about Jesus and to share our faith.

It would be unthinkable that Mary would see the risen Jesus and not share that news. Wouldn't it? Jesus is alive. How could she not run to tell people that news?!

But we withhold it all the time.

“Well that’s different.”

We have the same good news that Mary had.
We have the same savior that Mary had.
Jesus is as alive today as he was on the first Easter.

What’s our excuse?

The gospel past, present and future.

We see the work of God throughout time and how Christ fulfills it. We see the relationship Jesus invites us into today and we see the eternal hope that we have through him.

And yes we should enjoy that but we’re also meant to share that.

We had a missions training a couple months go and one of the big things they talked about was praying for someone you know who’s not a Christian and praying for them everyday. That’s still good to do.

But I would give the challenge to actually talk to someone who you don’t think is a Christian about Jesus.

It’s amazing how hard that can be for most of us. And I’ll always be the first to admit it can be a challenge for me too.

But how do we respond to knowing that our Lord is risen from the dead?

We should be respond by telling others about it and sharing the good news. Sometimes you’ll see someone who’s a new Christian and they can be some of the best evangelists. Someone whose life has been totally changed by Jesus and they can’t talk about anything else.

But so often, somewhere along the lines, most of us lose that passion to share. We talked about this passage on Easter Sunday and that was fitting.

But I like to celebrate every Sunday like it’s Easter. Every Sunday is a celebration that Christ is risen.

But it should also be the focal point of every day of our lives. That we live in the light of a risen savior. That we believe in a savior who reigns from heaven.

And so that is my prayer for us. That we be a church who is enthusiastic to share the good news.

Mary saw the risen Lord on the first Easter. She didn't understand it all or all of the implications of what that sighting meant but she had enough of the story to share it with others.

That Jesus is the savior of the world who once died but now lives.