

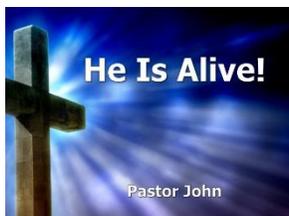
**He Is Alive!**

April 16, 2017

**John 20: 1-18**

*<sup>1</sup>On Sunday morning while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. <sup>2</sup>She ran to Simon Peter and to Jesus' favorite disciple and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb! We don't know where they have put him." <sup>3</sup>Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup>They ran side by side, until the other disciple ran faster than Peter and got there first. <sup>5</sup>He bent over and saw the strips of linen cloth lying inside the tomb, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>When Simon Peter got there, he went into the tomb and saw the strips of cloth. <sup>7</sup>He also saw the piece of cloth that had been used to cover Jesus' face. It was rolled up and in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>The disciple who got there first then went into the tomb, and when he saw it, he believed. <sup>9</sup>At that time Peter and the other disciple did not know that the Scriptures said Jesus would rise to life. <sup>10</sup>So the two of them went back to the other disciples. <sup>11</sup>Mary Magdalene stood crying outside the tomb. She was still weeping, when she stooped down <sup>12</sup>and saw two angels inside. They were dressed in white and were sitting where Jesus' body had been. One was at the head and the other was at the foot. <sup>13</sup>The angels asked Mary, "Why are you crying?" She answered, "They have taken away my Lord's body! I don't know where they have put him." <sup>14</sup>As soon as Mary said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not know who he was. <sup>15</sup>Jesus asked her, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener and said, "Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him." <sup>16</sup>Then Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him, "Rabboni." The Aramaic word "Rabboni" means "Teacher." <sup>17</sup>Jesus told her,*

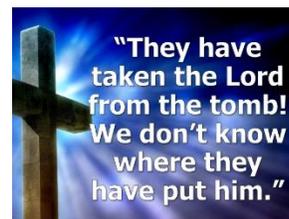
*"Don't hold on to me! I have not yet gone to the Father. But tell my disciples that I am going to the one who is my Father and my God, as well as your Father and your God."*<sup>18</sup> *Mary Magdalene then went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She also told them what he had said to her.*



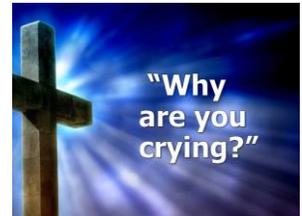
"He is Alive!" Today, this phrase will be said billions of times in churches all over the world and it will be posted trillions of times on social media. And after most of the times it was said or read, it was followed by, "He is Alive, indeed!" or "Amen." Easter Sunday is full of celebration and joy over the resurrected Christ. It is a wonderful day when we celebrate God's gift of salvation.

So today, let us also rejoice – He is risen!

But before we get to that point, we must begin a little earlier in the story. On that first Easter morning, all hope seemed lost. The authorities had crucified Jesus and shock had settled in on the disciples and His followers. But all was not lost – soon hope would return forever. At first, Mary Magdalene went out early in the morning and found the tomb empty. She then went to tell the disciples. We hear of Mary's reaction in verse: *"She ran to Simon Peter and to Jesus' favorite disciple and said, 'They have taken the Lord from the tomb! We don't know where they have put him.'"* There was panic in Mary's voice. She had gone to the tomb early the next day to wrap the body in spices, to properly care for Jesus' body, to offer one last loving gift to her Lord. But she could not do this.



The tomb was empty. In her mind, Jesus was gone. Not only was Jesus dead, but now they have taken His body as well. The disciples must have sensed the panic in Mary's voice. Verse three reads, "*Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.*" They ran all the way there, but Peter and John found the tomb empty as well. They returned to the other disciples, still not quite sure what to think. As John reports, "*At that time Peter and the other disciple did not know that the Scriptures said Jesus would rise to life.*" Mary stayed and stood crying outside the tomb. She probably did not know what else to do. No one knew Jesus was alive. Then Mary stooped down and looked inside the tomb. She saw two angels, dressed in white, sitting where Jesus' body had been laid. One of the angels then asked her, "*Why are you crying?*" There is a present tense you can hear in this question. Can you hear it? The angels know. The angels know the truth. He is alive!



Mary's head must have been spinning. The tomb is empty. The body is gone. She stands there, all alone, crying. Two angels appear and speak to her. It must have been very surreal for Mary. And just then she turns, and through her confusion and tear-filled eyes, she sees someone and says, "*Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him.*" Mary is still intent on caring for Jesus' body, on doing what she came to the tomb to do. But then Jesus calls her name, saying "*Mary!*" She recognizes Him instantly. In a

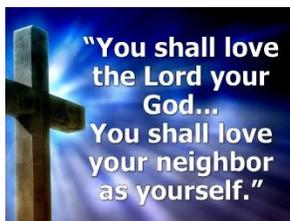


flash, she too knows – He is alive! Tears of pain and sorrow turn to tears of joy and elation! After Jesus calls her by name,

He instructs Mary to go and tell the disciples. Mary is now the messenger. She goes to the disciples and tells them that Jesus is alive. There is indeed resurrection after death. What seemed lost forever now has new life. Eternal life. He is alive!

The life that has just drawn to a close like no other also began like no other. We remember back to Jesus' birth. First, there was the incarnate birth – born partly human to a mother and partly divine to a heavenly father. Born of a virgin, without sin since birth. His birth and the events surrounding it indicate that ever since He drew His first breath, Jesus was a unique and special gift from God.

As we fast forward to the end of His life, Jesus experiences two other significant events. The resurrection and then the ascension come close together. Between His holy birth and divine death, Jesus teaches and heals for about three years, providing for us an example of how to live as a disciple of Christ. Central to Jesus' teachings and to the example that He lived out were the two great commandments. When asked by a teacher of the Law what the greatest commandment was, Jesus answered with two. Reading from Matthew 22, verses 37 through 40:



*He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

In the first commandment that He quoted, from the Book of Deuteronomy, Jesus is saying that we must place God above all else in our lives. God must be the priority, the One we consider first in all our decisions, choices, and planning. God must be at the center of all we do and must be at the core of who we are. In the second commandment, coming from the Book of Leviticus, Jesus is saying we must place 'neighbor' next on our list of who to consider. This, of course, means that 'self' comes last.

Jesus lived His entire life, right up to the moment that He gave His life on the cross, being obedient to God's will. Jesus loved God above all else and His life reflected this. Next, Jesus loved neighbor. For Jesus, and for us, neighbor means "everyone". It means those closest to us and it means the stranger we meet on the street. It means those who love us and those who do not. There are no examples in the Bible where Jesus refused to talk with or engage someone. Jesus always accepted people where they were at and offered them all He could to meet the need they had. For Jesus, it was always love God, always love neighbor.

In loving God and loving neighbor, Jesus taught many parables, told many stories, and performed many miracles. He gave sight to the blind, voice to the mute, hearing to the deaf. He healed the lame and cured the lepers. Jesus even restored some to life. While Jesus did restore people from the dead during His earthly ministry, He only raised them back to mortal life. In the resurrection of Jesus, it was God who raised Jesus to eternal or heavenly life. Jesus' resurrection is significant for both of these reasons. Just as God alone initiated

Jesus' human birth, God alone brought Jesus back home to heaven. After Jesus completed the ministry that He was sent to do, God welcomed Jesus back to His eternal home, as Jesus returns to once again sit at the right hand of the Father.



The ascension, or returning to God's right hand, is the other significant event at the end of Jesus' earthly life. We recall that in the Garden, outside the tomb, Jesus tells Mary, "*I am returning to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.*" In this statement Jesus declares where He is going and He also includes us in the relationship. God is our Father and our God too. This is an important part of our story. God is our Father. Jesus is our brother. These are the intimate relationships we are called to and enter in when we accept Jesus as Lord.

On the cross, Jesus took on the sin of the world. He took on not only the sin that had occurred before He went to the cross, but all the sin yet to come as well. That means He continues to take the sins, our sins, and He washes them away with His own blood. That is what Good Friday was all about. On the cross, the innocent, perfect Lamb took on our sin. On Friday night, as we gathered for worship, our MYF offered a beautiful human video that portrayed this gift. As the service drew near to a close, we were invited to write our sins on a piece of paper and to nail them to a cross. In naming our sins and nailing them to that cross, we were taking our part in nailing Jesus to that cross two thousand years ago. After the service, the Youth took those sins off the cross. Your sins



and my sin, were carried outside and were laid in the fire. As we prayed and offered our thanks for the forgiveness that Jesus bought with His blood, we saw our sins were no more.



Just as Jesus washes away our sins and restores us to a new creation, that fire consumed those papers. As I came back inside and saw the cross – the cross still full of nails – I realized the cost that

Jesus paid in a new way. It made me grateful in a new way.

I saw that cross full of nails as Jesus' body, bearing the sins of the world. It was and is a powerful image to consider.



As Jesus returns to His rightful place beside God, He returns changed. This is an important detail for you and I. He has lived on earth. He has felt what we feel. He has paid the price for our sins. He returns to heaven and, through His experiences as He walked the earth and through His death and resurrection, now Jesus intercedes for you and me. He now stands between God and us. The perfect lamb who was slain now offers intercession and mercy and forgiveness and grace for each of us. He who was without sin provides the way for us to enter eternal life. He ascended so that one day we too could ascend. For this incomprehensible gift, we say thanks be to God! But we cannot leave Easter here. We cannot say 'thank you' and simply return to everyday, normal life.

On the day after Easter and each day forward the question is: how do I live out my resurrection faith? Each day, how do I experience and share the incarnation of God in Jesus and the resurrection that leads to eternal life? On the first day of the week, Jesus appeared to His disciples and showed them His hands and

side. He gave them the Holy Spirit and sent them out into the world to continue His work. In resurrection faith, the disciples went out and rocked the world.

We too are empowered by the same Holy Spirit, called to share the good news of Jesus Christ so that all may come to know Him as Lord and Savior. This is done in mostly small, personal ways: talking with our neighbor, listening to a co-worker at lunch, taking time to get to know the stranger in need. It is about hearing another's story and sharing our faith story. It is all about developing a relationship with another so that we can share the relationship we have with Jesus Christ. It is about loving God and loving neighbor.

We are called and sent out by the same Christ that called and sent out the disciples. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we too can rock the world. This day and in the days ahead, may we each find ways to live out our resurrection faith.

Jesus called Mary by name and He calls each of us by name. His call is the same to us as it was to Mary: go forth and share the good news. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!!

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) When have you been lost and confused like Mary? How did Jesus call out to you? How did it affect you? How did it affect your faith?
- 2) Jesus lived loving God and loving neighbor. What are your greatest challenges to following His example? How can you better live this out?
- 3) In what practical and daily ways can you live out your 'resurrection faith', loving God with all that you are and loving neighbor as self?