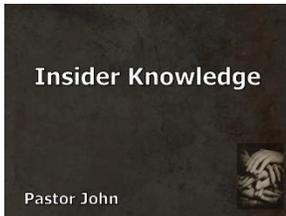


Scripture: John 20: 1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other 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 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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 Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because 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 she told them that he had said these things to her.



As we think back to the 1950s and 1960s, the high point of organized religion in the United States, there was a set pattern that most folks followed every Sunday morning.

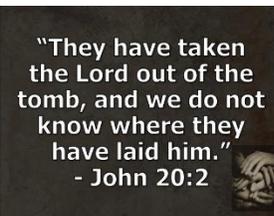
Perhaps you remember a similar pattern from your own experience growing up. Families all across America woke up, got dressed in their church clothes, went to church and Sunday School, and then had a nice Sunday dinner. When a new family moved to town, about the first thing they did was to find a nice, respectable church to attend on Sunday mornings. Sometime in the first few months the new person or couple or family would go through the church’s membership class and would come to understand what that church believed. It was the same no matter if it was a Methodist or Lutheran or Baptist or Catholic church. At the end of that class they would profess to believe as the church believed and they would set a date to become members. By that time the new person had learned how to dress, how to act, how to behave, and so on. As the membership Sunday approached, they would also learn how the service worked – we stand here, we sit then, we pray this way, and so forth. And then the day

would arrive. They joined the church. They became a member, and at that point, they now officially belonged. How many of you remember those days?

The pattern for many years was this: believe, behave, belong. It is the pattern I described just now that was common in the 1950s and 1960s. It was a wonderfully effective method for accepting and integrating people into the life of a church. But when we stop and take a look at the way that Jesus ministered, we see that this was not the pattern that Jesus practiced. When Jesus encountered a new or non-believing person, He began with belong. He did not require a person to first believe in Him or even to behave a certain way. Jesus met people right where they were at and made them feel welcomed and loved. He heard their stories and felt their pain or their hurt or even their sin. And He said that it is okay, do not worry about all of that stuff. Just step inside my love and know that you belong, dearly loved child of God. The belief, the behavior, that will come later. But for now, just know that you belong.

Today, in our scripture from John's Gospel, we see how Mary and the disciples react to the resurrection. Mary and the disciples have spent three years with Jesus. Jesus has spoken to them many times about His death and resurrection. He spoke of His impending death and resurrection both with analogies and with straight forward language. In a few instances, He was even warning them of the change that was soon to come. They had also witnessed Jesus raising someone from the dead firsthand. They were eyewitnesses to Jesus' power over death. Yet even with all of this insider knowledge, Peter and John left the tomb that day not quite sure what to think or do or believe.

As our scripture opens today, Mary goes to the tomb early in the morning to care for Jesus' body. His body had been hastily placed in the tomb late on Friday and then was there all day Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath day. It was against the Law to do any work on the Sabbath, so Mary waited and came to the tomb early on Sunday morning. Verse one reminds us of what she found when she arrived. As Mary entered the garden and approached the tomb, she found *"that the stone had been removed from the tomb"*. At that point Mary leaves and finds someone to tell. She finds Peter and John, *"the one whom Jesus loved"*, and tells them, *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him"*. In this statement, we see that Mary still has not connected all that Jesus had said about His resurrection to what has actually happened. She thinks that someone has moved or, worse yet, stolen Jesus' body. I think it is with this understanding that Peter and John race to the tomb.

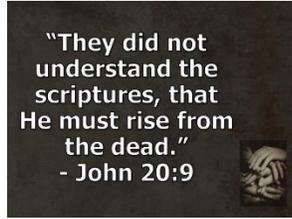


"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."
- John 20:2

John is a bit faster and he arrives at the empty tomb first. He looked in and saw the linen that had been wrapped around Jesus' body lying there where Jesus had been laid. Then Peter arrives and heads right in. Peter has always been the one quick to act and often slow to think. Remember, he was the one who stepped out of the boat and walked on water. Remember, he was the one who drew the sword and cut off the guard's ear as they came to arrest Jesus. And, remember, Peter is the only one to follow along to see what would happen to Jesus on the night that He was arrested. So, of course Peter goes right in. He sees the cloth and linen wrappings. Then John, the one Jesus loved, the one that wrote the gospel we read today, went in. Verse eight, tells us, *"He saw and believed"*.

John was unique in this. When he saw the empty tomb and the clothes that had been around Jesus now lying there, he knew in his heart that Jesus had risen from the dead. John saw and believed because he knew that if the religious leaders or someone else had stolen the body, they would never have taken it without the grave clothes. The fact that the grave clothes were still there, folded neatly, probably indicated to John that the hand of God had been at work. But John is the exception because his belief comes by faith.

For John and all of the other disciples, verse nine tells us, "*they did not understand the scriptures, that He must rise from the dead*". This passage may seem strange to us.



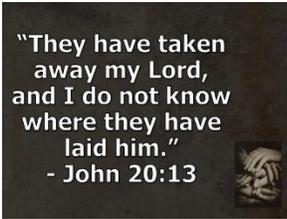
"They did not understand the scriptures, that He must rise from the dead."
- John 20:9

Three years and all that first-hand experience with Jesus and His miracles and teachings, day after day after day, and the disciples and Jesus' followers still do not quite get the resurrection in the moment. But we must also understand that by the time that John wrote his account of Jesus' life and ministry, some fifty years after Jesus' death, the church had come to a detailed understanding of how the Old Testament scriptures explained the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But in the moment, outside the tomb, they could not connect what they had surely read in the Old Testament and what Jesus had said when He was alive with what they were now experiencing. I think if we found ourselves there, in that moment, still reeling from the shocking and unexpected events of the past couple of days, we too would have a hard time connecting all of the dots.


 Insider Knowledge

And then we have Mary Magdalene. Mary also has a long history with Jesus. In both the gospels of Mark and Luke, Mary meets Jesus early in His ministry. When she first met Jesus, Mary was a mess. In both gospels, Mary is possessed by seven demons. When she meets Jesus, He casts these demons out of her, restoring her to wholeness. In removing this evil from her, Jesus would allow her to rejoin her family and the community, re-establishing that sense of love and belonging that is so important to our well-being.

Returning to our scripture today, we remember that at first Mary went to the tomb to care for Jesus' body. When she arrived, she saw that the stone had been rolled away. Her first reaction is to tell the disciples. We know that Peter and John went to the tomb, but they left and went back to their homes. But then Mary remains. She stands outside the tomb weeping. She looks again into the empty tomb and there are now two angels sitting where Jesus' body had once laid. The angels ask Mary why she is weeping. In her response, we can see that she is still deep in her grief. You can hear the raw emotion in her voice as she says, *"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him"*. Then Mary must have sensed that someone was standing behind her. She turns around and through her grief and tear-filled eyes, she assumes it to be the gardener. It is a logical thought for Mary to have. Then He asks her the same question, *"Woman, why are you weeping?"*, followed immediately by a more probing question, *"Whom are you looking for?"*



"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."
- John 20:13

In this second question, Jesus reveals that He understands her pain and grief and even confusion. And again, in her response, Mary reveals the hurt and the pain and the grief she feels: *"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away"*. She simply wants to care for Jesus' body. This woman who was saved from a life of isolation and ridicule and loneliness just wants to offer her love and care to the body of the one who had freed her from all of this.

Then, in a word, Jesus cuts through all of Mary's confusion and hurt and pain and once again restores her. Jesus simply says, *"Mary"* and instantly she recognizes that this is Jesus standing before her. Mary's world is suddenly turned right-side up again. She cries out, *"Rabbouni"*, the name she commonly used for Jesus. We also do this when greeting a long-lost friend. In that moment of recognition, we shout out their name. Jesus then goes on to reassure Mary that He is alive and that He will soon ascend to *"my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"*. Mary returns to the disciples and shares the good news: *"I have seen the Lord"*.

A dark rectangular box with the text "Insider Knowledge" in white. To the right of the text is a small, faint image of a hand holding a scroll.

Insider Knowledge

Initially this news that Jesus is risen is insider knowledge for Mary, the disciples, and those gathered together. They have spent the past few days locked away, hiding in that upper room, mourning and grieving the loss of Jesus. They have no idea that Jesus is risen - until this knowledge is shared. In the weeks ahead, as the story unfolds, there is still some doubt and fear. The resurrection is a hard thing to understand. To help His followers, the risen Christ continues to appear to His

followers, to teach them, to breathe the Holy Spirit on them, and to help them begin to live into their roles as the new leaders of the church. Over the next two weeks, we will explore this progression.

Today, though, we celebrate the risen Lord along with Mary and the disciples. It is not insider knowledge anymore. Today Christians here in Winner and in places all around the world exclaim, "Jesus is Risen!" He is risen indeed. We celebrate because it is through the risen Christ that we are all welcomed and invited into a personal relationship with God. It is through Jesus that we belong.

Today we also celebrate communion. Communion is the sacrament that returns us to belonging after we have sinned and separated ourselves from God's love. It is through the body and blood that Jesus gave for you and me that we are made holy and perfect once again in God's sight. He suffered and died for our sins so that we could be brought back into relationship with our God. As forgiven people, we are able to live in connection with God.

In 1st Peter 3:18 we read, *"For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God"*. Jesus died for you and for me and for all

"For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God."
- 1st Peter 3:18

people everywhere – once for all. This is great news. It means that we can always belong. It means that we are welcome here, both here in this church and here in this faith community and here at the table. We belong. It is a great place to start this journey together. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Over the course of your faith journey, how has your understanding that you belong to Jesus grown? How has this deepened your faith?
- 2) In what area or struggle in your life do you need to hear Jesus call out your name (like He called “Mary”)? Pray for Him to be at work in you.
- 3) Through being Jesus’ hands and feet, we help others to know that they belong to God too. Who will you help to know this better this week?