



*Easter Sunday*

## **RESURRECTION MATH**

John 20:1-29

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*Do you remember  
in math class  
when the teacher  
would ask you to  
show your work?  
If [each Christian]  
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## **Scripture**

### **John 20:1-29**

*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. <sup>2</sup>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.' <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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.' <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.'* <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>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."' <sup>18</sup>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.

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

## Sermon

**I get asked**, every now and then, to become involved in business ventures that I come to learn are pyramid schemes. As people begin to give me the spiel, I start to get suspicious when they tell me that the product that is being sold by this company doesn't really matter, what matters is the company's innovative, unique management structure. I get more suspicious when they tell me that there is an up-front investment that I need to make – that I'll receive back many times over... and soon! Almost each time I am approached by these friends I am told that it is the perfect opportunity for someone in ministry because I have so many contacts in my congregation that I could approach about becoming a partner in the venture (now aren't you glad I always say no?). Inevitably the phrase is used that this is a "life-changing opportunity." My suspicions that this is a pyramid venture are then confirmed by the ironic insistence on the part of my friend when they say, "This is *not* a pyramid scheme."

Even when the pitch comes from friends, I don't trust what is being sold. And of course my sense of suspicion is not reserved for invitations into pyramid ventures. Every day you and I are asked to believe in something or someone. We are regularly presented with claims of truth and asked to believe.

This morning we are gathered here in this place to say that we believe in something that we too claim is "life-changing." Many of us, perhaps even most of us, would say that this belief is *the* life-changing belief in our own lives. We say that we believe that Jesus of Nazareth was – and is – the Son of God, resurrected by the Father, very God of very Gods and alive this very day. It's not so much that we believe in this as abstract truth; we're not simply celebrating the idea of God today, or the idea of the renewal of life, or the concept of the resurrection. No, it's that we believe Jesus himself, and what we have heard him say and do. We believe in the story that we have read this morning, the story that is told by Matthew, Mark, and

Luke as well. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus and the evidence that the resurrection gives that Jesus is the Son of God. Furthermore our belief in Jesus Christ is not just one of the things that we believe in but it is the central thing in which we believe. The crucified Jesus becomes our Savior, and the resurrected Jesus becomes our living Lord, and our lives are lived in service to him.

We had many friends in Memphis that would go to the gulf shore of Florida for summer vacations. I went a couple of times. The waters off the gulf are so warm and placid; swimming in them was like taking a bath. Growing up in Southern California we used to spend quite a few days at the beach. When we got to the beach, my siblings and I would head out to swim in the water. That water is cold. You don't just stroll into the Pacific enjoying the warmth. My sisters would ease their way into the water: toes followed by feet, followed by calves, thighs, bellies, and then, with great fear and trepidation, they would duck their heads under water. At each step of the way, they would wait to acclimate that part of the body that was in the water, trying to match their internal temperatures with the water temperature while ignoring the air temperature that was calling them back to shore.

My sisters' method was not my method for entering the ocean waters. When I got to the beach, I would quickly lay my stuff down and I would then take off running for the water, as fast as I could. When the coldness of the water reached me, I ignored it and ran even faster, through the first set of breakers and as far as the where the waves were beginning to form and then I threw myself under the water, gasping for breath but quickly acclimated to the ocean's temperature.

The twentieth chapter of John's gospel is a recounting of the many different ways in which the followers of Jesus come to believe that he has been resurrected. Some come to the decision slowly and some come to believe at the first sign that they see of the resurrection.

All of the followers of Christ come to the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter out of a starting point of sadness and disappointment. Though Jesus had pointed to his arrest and death with consistent regularity, it still seems to have caught his followers off guard. Death always seems to bring this element of surprising emotion. I have witnessed family members, faced by the lingering death of a loved one whose disease has been declared terminal, who are still overwhelmed by the emotional sense of loss when the death finally happens. We are never truly prepared for death, so we should not be surprised that death shocked the disciples.

Mary's reaction then is even more understandable. In her grief she has come to the tomb of Christ and finds that the stone guarding the tomb has been removed and that the body of Jesus is nowhere to be seen. She is distraught by what she believes is the stealing of his body and runs to tell Peter and the beloved disciple what she has seen – or not seen.

Imagine the emotions that were running through Peter and John when they came running to the tomb. All that they see is the wrappings that had been placed around the body of the dead Jesus.

It is in that moment that the beloved disciple "believed." John connects the empty tomb to Jesus' prediction of his resurrection and he knows that Christ's prophecy has come true. He has run into the waters of Jesus, headlong, and immersed himself in the resurrected Lord. There are beloved disciples here this morning. Some of you have come to your belief in the Living Jesus by a faith that is natural, quick, and complete. The evidence of the claims of Jesus makes sense for you, and the Spirit has opened your eyes without hesitation to the truths of his claims.

Peter does not yet get it – which is consistent with what we know about Peter. Mary not only does not get it but she begins to weep in pain and horror at the notion of the body being stolen. Even when she

encounters angels, her grief remains. And then she encounters Jesus himself, but blinded by her pain, she cannot see that her resurrected Lord stands before her.

Again, there are many here today that find themselves identifying with Mary. Hurt and pain and disappointment have made you wary. You have seen enough of the cruelty of a broken world that it is very hard for you to believe that there is a God greater than the empirical evidence of pain that surrounds you. To believe is to trust and for some of you the journey of trust to disappointment is a journey that you have taken time and time again. To quote the Who, "You won't get fooled again."

Notice then, what changes Mary from a doubter to a believer; what changes her from the last in a long line of skeptics to the first evangelist of the Christian church: Jesus calls her by name. It is Christ who calls her out of the fog of doubt and into the sunshine of eternal life in him. By naming her, he empowers her, and she becomes a witness to his truth that is found in his resurrection.

In many ways what Jesus gives to Mary is what he gives to the disciples when he next appears to them as they are gathered together. The first thing that the resurrected Jesus offers to his followers is his peace. And maybe it is the peace of Christ that is the greatest distinction that we have as his followers. In a world that lives in turmoil, with wars and conflict, relationships broken, disease and struggle, we followers of Christ know peace. That peace is never a reflection that we have risen above the circumstances in which we all find ourselves, our peace is in our belief in the Risen One, the One who conquered even death and has made our lives whole and filled us with *his* peace.

For whatever reason, Thomas is not there when Jesus first appears to his disciples. His absence from the community contributes to his doubt. But what I love here is that the community welcomes him back even though his doubts in what they have come to believe continue. Thomas is not sure, and maybe more than a lack of surety he actually is openly defying the witness of others. But he is there with them and they are seemingly glad to have him.

Thomas takes far longer than anyone else to come to believe that Jesus is alive. He wants empirical proof, to see and hear and touch Jesus. There are certainly Thomases here today; some of you for the once or twice you come to church all year, and some of you who doubt are here every Sunday. Yet, when Jesus becomes real to Thomas, when Thomas comes to believe in Jesus, he sees him more clearly than anyone else has to that point. It is Thomas who sees the fullness of who Jesus is; it is Thomas who stirringly confesses: "My Lord and my God!" It took him longer but he sure got all the way there. I am glad that the community of believers allowed Thomas to be with them when he met the Risen Lord; I am even gladder that Christ came to Thomas.

Do you remember in math class when the teacher would ask you to "show your work"? Each Christian here this morning, if they were to show their work in how Christ brought them to belief, they would show a different equation. The beloved disciples here would hardly have any work to show; Christ came that naturally to them. The ones like Peter and Mary would have to lay out the formulas of doubt and question before the added on the seeing of Christ or the hearing of Jesus call their name. Some of you would need to show the peace that Jesus gave you in your lives that multiplied into a changed life and a life centered on the Lord. And some of you would need to show the work of Christ in your life that brought you to belief that he is Lord and God.

The common denominator is Jesus himself. He is the Risen One. He is the peacemaker and the life-changer and Lord and God. He is why we are here today, and why for us today is another day in an eternity of days in his presence.