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John 20:1-18

All People Doubt, Do Something About It!

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. **2**So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." **3** So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. **4**The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; **5**and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. **6**And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, **7**and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. **8**So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. **9**For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. **10**So the disciples went away again to their own homes. **11** But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; **12**and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. **13**And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because 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, and 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 Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). **17**Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

Even Christians Doubt

Are Christians allowed to doubt? Whether we are allowed to doubt or not, we do. We doubt ourselves, each other, and God. Did you hear about the woman who was rescued from the runaway carriage? She said she trusted God until the reigns broke. She did not trust God, she trusted the reigns.

C.S. Lewis once said, "I think the trouble with me is lack of faith. I have no rational ground for going back on the arguments that convinced me of God's existence: but the irrational deadweight of my old nature remains... Mind you I don't think so – the whole of my reasonable mind is convinced [of Christianity]: but I often feel so" (Alister McGrath, *Doubting*, p. 9). All people doubt.

In our gospel reading we find doubt among the early disciples. John 19:1-3 tells us, "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb."

In this passage we see that Mary was the first to discover Jesus' body was missing. Who was this Mary? Mary was one of the women standing by Jesus while he died on the cross (19:25). She became a follower of Christ when Jesus cast seven demons out of her. This is important because Mary obviously knew the power of both God and the Devil! She knew that God is greater than the Devil! Of all people who should understand that the empty tomb meant Jesus defeated the devil, she did not. Instead, she ran back to the disciples and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him" (20:2).

This did not sit well with Peter and John so they ran to the tomb. Surely they would understand. Peter and John were the first disciples called by Jesus. Peter had confessed that Jesus had the words of eternal life. John was the beloved disciple. Both had seen Jesus transfigured. Both had witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. They had even heard Jesus speak of resurrection. Surely they would understand. But they didn't. They too did not know what was happening.

Friends, it is easy to doubt what is true. It is also easy not to understand what God is up to. The question for us this morning is what to do with our doubt. The answer is simple: we need to deal with it. I want to offer four ways to deal with doubt when it arises.

First, when you doubt, pray. Ask God to help you. God loves to hear you pray. God even loves to hear you bring your doubts to him. The Lord's Prayer begins with the words "Our Father." With these words God wants you to attract you, so that you would ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father. Pray when you doubt.

Second, when you doubt, listen to what people on the other side of the argument say. In the case of the resurrection, look at the arguments from those who deny the resurrection. When you do, you will realize their positions are very foolish.

How many of you recognize the name John Allegro? Allegro was a respected scholar who argued against the resurrection. He had done research on the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the 1970's, he wrote a book and had many followers. His argument was that Jesus never existed at all. Instead, the word Jesus was nothing more and nothing less than some sort of codeword for a sacred mushroom, which produced hallucinations. The early Christians, he argued, far from being worshipers of the person Jesus Christ, were secret mushroom-eaters. In fact, he said that the words "Eloi, Eloi, lama shabacthani (my God my God why has though forsaken me) really was an incantation to say as you pull the sacred mushroom from the ground.

I think John Allegro ate too many mushrooms. When you doubt, listen to the other side of the argument. Your faith will be strengthened.

Third, when you doubt, look at the facts. In our passage we see many facts that speak of the resurrected Jesus. An empty tomb. Folded burial cloths and head covering. Two angels. A risen Jesus you can lay hold of. Not a vision, a ghost, an illusion, or a fond wish. There are eyewitnesses - John, Peter, Mary. Soon the other disciples. By the end of the month, over 500 witnesses who witnessed to the resurrection. These clues are important.

The empty tomb is important because all a person had to do in the early church to destroy Christianity was to bring the body out of the tomb. The opponents of Christianity could not do that. The *folded burial clothes* meant this was not the work of robbers. Robbers do not tidy up after themselves.

Robbers go quickly in and out. *The eyewitnesses* are the most important. They had nothing to gain by saying Jesus rose from the dead. They were killed and persecuted for this message. How many people are willing to die for a lie? If it was a cover-up, surely one of them would have spilled the beans.

Chuck Colson, who was arrested for the Watergate scandal sheds light on this in a chapter he wrote entitled "Watergate and the Resurrection." Colson makes the point that with the most powerful office in the world at stake, with all of the privileges of power, with the threat of imprisonment, ten men in the White House could not hold together a conspiracy for more than two weeks. He concludes:

Is it really likely, then, that a deliberate cover-up, a plot to perpetuate a lie about the Resurrection, could have survived the violent persecution of the apostles, the scrutiny of early church councils, the horrendous purge of the first-century believers who were cast by the thousands to the lions for refusing to renounce the Lordship of Christ? Is it not probable that at least one of the apostles would have renounced Christ before being beheaded or stoned? Is it not likely that some "smoking gun" document might have been produced exposing the "Passover plot"? Surely one of the conspirators would have made a deal with the authorities.... Take it from one who was inside the Watergate web looking out, who saw firsthand how vulnerable a cover-up is: Nothing less than a witness as awesome as the resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive and Lord (Charles Colson, *Loving God*, pp. 61-70).

When you doubt, look at the facts.

Fourth, when you doubt, listen to Jesus. That is what Mary did. Mary did not recognize Jesus with her eyes. She saw the two angels and she did not believe. She also saw Jesus face to face and thought he was a gardener. Mary was a little slow on the uptake. Mary must have been a Lutheran. It was not until Jesus called her by name that she believed. As verse 16 says, "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)."

You can understand this. You know the sound of a father or mother's voice calling you by name. You know the sound of your spouse's voice calling you. You even know by the tone if you should come or hide out in the garage. You know their voice.

Mary knew the voice of Jesus. It was the voice of the good shepherd. The voice that calls his sheep and the sheep come to him. It is the voice that called Lazarus out of the tomb: "Lazarus, Lazarus, come out!" It is the voice that called the disciples to follow. It was the voice that created the universe. As Jesus called out to Mary, the Creator of the universe was creating faith within her. She heard his voice and she believed.

Even more, Jesus goes on to give Mary a wonderful promise to share with the other disciples. Verse 17: "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" In other words, you are now children of God born not of flesh or blood but by the will of God. My Father is your Father. My God is your God. My work on the cross has accomplished this. Go tell the disciples. Tell them these words so that they too would hear my voice and believe.

Mary became the first evangelist: "I have seen the Lord,' and that He had said *these things* to her."

Conclusion

Reformation, do you doubt? Of course you do? All people doubt. Do something about it. Pray and ask God to help you with your doubt. Look at the other arguments being made out there. Most are so foolish they will only strengthen your faith. Look at the facts. Where is the body? Why couldn't anyone find a body? Why wasn't a single person able to pull out the body? It is because there is no body.

Most important, in the midst of doubt, open your Bibles come to church and listen to the words of Jesus. Hear his voice calling you to himself.

But you might object, "Lord I have many demons." "That is okay Mary come and be delivered!"

"But Lord I have so much doubt." "Thomas, see my hands and touch my side."

"But Lord I have denied you three times." "Peter I will not deny you."

"But Lord I persecuted Christians." "Paul I will send you to defend them."

"But Lord I am a dealer of fine linens." "Lydia soon you will deal with Christians."

"But Lord I am a mere boy." "Timothy your mother and grandmother followed me and so too will you. Now go."

Over and over again, God calls to you by name declaring wonderful promises to you. When God calls, listen to his voice and trust his word. Trust Him with your life and your death. His wounds are your healing. His death is your freedom. His blood is your forgiveness. His resurrection is your hope. His words are filled with great promises for you.

Alleluia; He is risen!

**In Jesus Name,
Amen!**