

Easter Sunday 09/04/2023 - Pastor Grahame Walker's Sermon Notes:

I want to look at three people who experienced that first Easter and how it affected them and changed their lives. Firstly, Mary Magdalene. She was a very sick woman when she first met Jesus but he healed her and gave her a new beginning. She was so grateful that she dedicated her life to him.

She is mentioned 14 times in the bible making her one of the most prominently mentioned women in the entire New Testament. Immediately after the resurrection of Jesus she went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. This was common for Jews of the day and was an act of love and devotion. They didn't embalm the dead but would anoint the body with spices. When she got there, she found the stone was rolled away and the body gone. We read in John 20: 11-13; **¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."**

Mary had been grieving over the death of Jesus. Rightfully so as she was one of the few who actually witnessed the crucifixion itself. When all of the other disciples except John fled, she stayed by the cross along with John and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Then still grieving she went out to his tomb to anoint his body with spices and she found that his body was gone. She may have thought it had been taken by grave robbers, adding more pain to her loss. The only thing that could speak to her grief was a risen Jesus and that's exactly who came to her. Let me keep reading; John 20: 14-18;

¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him. ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (Which means "Teacher"). ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Jesus called her by name wanting to comfort her with the reality of the resurrection and because of his resurrection, death would never be the final word over anyone's life ever again. There is nothing like the emotion of grief. We read that Mary had been crying. Actually, in the original Greek language the word for crying literally mean wailing!

Now, we know that the resurrection of Jesus means that death in this life is not the end and when you are experiencing grief like Mary did, that's when the resurrection of Jesus matters because your loss is not permanent. Because those in Christ will share in his resurrection. We see this in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.**

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Mary's grief had been ministered to by the resurrection of Christ and I am sure she went from astonishment to happiness. So, the resurrection not only changes our life it helps us when we lose others. It can also help us when we become overwhelmed by doubt.

Let's look at a man by the name of Thomas. He has been known all throughout history as doubting Thomas which is a little unfair. He was a good friend of Jesus. Doubt isn't the same as unbelief. It means; "in two minds". You are weighing things, considering things. Here is something that Thomas asked Jesus while he was alive. **John 14: 1-7**

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going. ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Jesus is clear. There are not lots of ways to the father, there are not a myriad of ways to find God. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and none comes to the father accept through me. Thomas was always trying to understand Jesus and his teaching. So, when Jesus was crucified and died it rocked his spiritual world, and when he heard the rumours that he had risen from the dead. It was too much for him to cope with. Three days after the crucifixion, Jesus presented himself to some of the disciples. Thomas wasn't there. So, they immediately went and told him about it. This is what Thomas said:

John 20:25 ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

So, what happened next?

John 20:26-28 ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Notice Jesus appeared to the same people in the same house and Jesus turned straight toward Thomas. Does he condemn him for his doubt? He goes to Thomas and says receive my peace. Doubt is an honest way to reflect on your spiritual journey but it never brings much peace especially if you are always in a state of doubting.

Jesus says to Thomas essentially, here put your finger in my hands and your hand in my side and believe. I want you to know what I told you about myself is true; I am the way, the truth and the life. From that moment on Thomas never ever doubted again. Tradition has it that Thomas dies a martyr’s death. He refused to back down and said, “I saw him, kill me if you must but its true”. Then he was run through with a lance. The resurrection settled everything for Thomas and it settles everything for the Christian faith.

Let’s move to our last person, Peter who was not just a disciple of Jesus but was very close to him. He like the other 12 disciples was handpicked by Jesus. But Peter was part of his inner circle along with James and John. On the last night that he would ever spend with Jesus Peter said, “*I would lay my life down for you!*”. Then Jesus looked him in the eye and said, “*Peter, before the dawn comes, before the rooster crows three times in the morning you will deny knowing me three times*”. That must have been devastating for Peter to hear. Let’s read on and find out what happened.

Peter’s First Denial John 18 15-18.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter. He replied, “I am not.” ¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Peter’s Second and Third Denials

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

²⁶ One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

This wasn't just a fleeting dismissal of Jesus this was a serious breakdown, which led to a spiritual crisis for Peter. Peter had given up on all of his relationship with Jesus in one night. All the teaching and ministry of Jesus that he had personally witnessed. All the time that Jesus predicted that he would rise again after 3 days. All gone in one terrible night for Peter. So, he left the other disciples and went back to what he did before he met Jesus fishing, he was a commercial fisherman.

So here's what happened next, John 21:4-9

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Let's stop there. Peter is out fishing, not catching anything. A stranger comes and says, "Try the other side of the boat". Peter does and the net is filled with fish. Peter was so excited that Jesus had appeared to him that he couldn't even stay in the boat. He jumped out and swam to Jesus. When he got there breakfast was waiting for him. Let's find out what happened next.

John 21: 15-17 Jesus Reinstates Peter

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. "Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

Jesus simply asked Peter – Do you love me? He never mentioned Peter's failure. Never asked for an apology. Never raised any issues with Peter's very public betrayal of Jesus. He just asked Peter; "Do you love me?" I bet that was welcomed by Peter but he was probably a little surprised. What Jesus was really interested in was the state of Peter's heart. Peter's guilt and shame was taken away. God loves us no matter what we have done. If we think that Jesus is interested in our failures more than our heart, you're wrong.

His biggest area of interest is this: 'Will you love me and allow me to love you'. God forgave Peter and he restores him totally. No strings attached. God wants to restore all of us right where we are. Jesus didn't say, shame on you Peter, he said shame off you, Peter. Only Jesus could say that, only a resurrected Jesus can do that for us.

You see If our greatest need was education, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need was technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need was money, God would have sent an economist. If our greatest need was pleasure God would have sent an entertainer. Our greatest real need was forgiveness so God sent a saviour. Our own efforts at self-transformation might improve our lifestyle or our attitude but fundamentally we are left unchanged. Our greatest need is to be forgiven and reconciled to God and for that we need a saviour.

When God forgives you, there are several things you need to know about it. Firstly, its instant. You don't have to wait, Its instant. Its undeserved you can't earn it. You can't work for it. You can't bribe God for it, it's undeserved. **2 Cor 5.17 says....**

If anyone is in Christ he becomes a new person....The past is finished and gone.