

Processing Life's Difficulties John 20:1-18

It's been really fun over the past several weeks walking through the gospel narrative, recalibrating our hearts and minds, as we focus on the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ. It's wild how many modern day, current issues are addressed in just the simplicity of the gospel. The truth, the meaning, the work, the application of what Jesus did and said- in His life, death, and resurrection- is absolutely timeless and so applicable to our daily lives. As we continue through the narrative in John 20, I trust this morning that God will make His word relevant, piercing, and powerful to you right now in whatever life situation or season you currently find yourself in.

Pastor Dave led us through the end of John chapter 19 last week, and I absolutely love how John narrates in detail the acts of Joseph and Nicodemus, who up until this point had been secret, fearful followers of Jesus. I love the encouragement they offer to us as they, in the midst of extremely unfavorable political, social, economic, and spiritual times- in witnessing Christ's death- they were somehow emboldened to fearlessly ask for Jesus' body, and then they chose to unashamedly cart around 75 pounds (or 100 pounds as in *Roman* pounds as some of your Bibles might read)- either way- they were carting around a ridiculous amount of embalming spices, not giving a rip about what anyone else thought. May your love, passion, commitment to Jesus be just as bold, and in whatever areas your heart is tempted towards fear, may the work He did through His life, death, and resurrection embolden you to new levels of sincere passion- following Him publicly, no matter what the world thinks.

Now the other gospel accounts give us the details that after these two men prepared Jesus' body for burial, they then laid Jesus in a new tomb that Joseph had bought for himself, and then Pilate gave orders for that tomb to be guarded, and sealed. And by sealed, more than likely what that meant was "sealed" as in how a letter used to be sealed with a hot wax stamp. After the wax dried and the letter was sent, one could easily detect if it had been opened or tampered with along the way by evidence of the wax seal being broken. Of course, in this case it would have been a lot more wax and a much larger, giant stamp that placed a seal over part of the rock and part of the rock wall. There in that sealed tomb, Jesus remained for 3 days. If you have interest in exploring further the subject of, on

what day Jesus was crucified and how many days it was before Sunday, do a search online for Last Supper Chronology Gladly Branch, and you'll find teaching on that subject.

Look with me now in John 20, starting in verse 1. ([verses 1-10](#)) So, Joseph and Nicodemus had come out from being secret believers, and had wrapped Jesus in linen wrappings along with the 75 pounds of spices, and then Mary comes three days later to add additional fragrances on Sunday morning. To her surprise the seal is broken, the stone covered tomb has been opened, and she assumes the Romans or someone else has moved the body. She runs back and gets Peter and the "other disciple whom Jesus loved," which is the author John's way of saying *himself*- in a humble third person description- although maybe not too humble since in [verse 4](#) he mentions that he was much faster than Peter when running. Although John beat Peter there, John admits that it was Peter who entered first and noticed not just the linen wrappings, but also that the face-cloth was rolled up separately. I'm sure in the moment, these guys had a nervousness, and high alert awareness, and were taking in every detail that might clue them in on what had happened there. If the body had been taken, it would have made much more sense that the wrappings *wouldn't* have been there. After three days of body decay, no one in their right mind would have thought it a good idea to mess with and take off bandages from a bloodied, three-day old corpse. They would have just grabbed the mummified corpse in one bundle and hauled it off. The rolled-up face covering set aside was a sign of intentionality, it wasn't a sign of some sick persons or raging beasts stripping the corpse, tearing off bundles of bandages- no, care was taken in neatly rolling up a face covering that was no longer needed.

And John, in [verse 8](#), lets us know that when he saw this evidence, he believed. Though he and all the disciples were previously told Jesus would be crucified and then resurrected, it was taken as a misunderstanding or an impossibility, and there in that moment, John recalls, that was the moment of his true belief. I hope that you too, can recall that moment of true belief- not necessarily when you started going to church, or when you learned about Jesus, but that moment when you really got it- and put your whole faith, trust, hope in Jesus. For John, that belief was a bit of a process. John had heard Jesus' teaching for about three years, eye witnessed His many miracles, but here in this moment it all clicked, and he believed. If you're wrestling with what that moment looked like in your life, then I encourage you to reach out after the service or during this week to have a

conversation with either Pastor Dave or myself. So then, in **verse 10** we see John and Peter, just matter-of-factly head home. In stereotypical male fashion, they were like *“Well, nothing to see here. What else can we do? Let’s go home.”* In contrast, Mary’s reaction is a little different- [verse 11](#)...

Mary, in perhaps stereotypical *female* fashion, is obviously more emotionally engaged, and is processing through everything. Guys typically often want to avoid the emotions and processing, and are often quick to move on to the next thing, or deal with fear/pain/stress with distractions, but gals are often better at digging deeper, processing, being patient to properly connect with the present emotions and life circumstances. And I believe that there is good purpose in God wiring men the way He did, and women the way He did. But look at the amazing encounter Mary was able to experience as a result of her soaking in the weight of the moment. ([Verses 12-16](#))

Because Mary wasn’t in a hurry, because she didn’t stuff her emotions, because she was present in the moment, she was given the honored privilege of being the first one to see the resurrected Christ. He met her right there where she was, and asked her two very important questions- *“Why are you weeping?”* and *“Whom are you seeking?”*. I believe that as Jesus met Mary there in her difficult moment, He wants to meet you in your difficult moment. But you just can’t brush past it. You can’t just get up and go home immediately when you encounter confusion, stress, hurt, fear. No- whether guy or gal- you need to take a moment, as Mary did, and look at the situation dead in the eyes, absorbing the heaviness, honestly assessing the situation, and let Jesus meet you there. And I believe that if you are still long enough, Jesus wants to ask you the same questions. *“Why are you weeping- what is it exactly that your heart is breaking over?”* You know, sometimes we feel confused, stressed, hurt, fearful and we attribute those negative sentiments with some surface level situation, and yet the true root of our negative sentiment lies deeper. We must stop, dwell in the moment, and ask ourselves, *“What is this really about? Has my pride been hurt, my expectations crushed, my goals delayed, my trust broken...”* And as we dig deeper, closer to the root, Jesus wants us to see that the bottom of the root is even deeper than we imagined, so He asks us the follow up question *“Who are you seeking?”* Ah ha... *who...*

So often the confusion, stress, hurt, and fear we experience through our pride being hurt, expectations crushed, goals delayed, trust broken- so often those negative sentiments result from us seeking the approval of man, or from seeking the glorification of ourselves, or from placing our desires and hopes into the wrong things and into the wrong people. If only you could realize that the longing of your heart, the seeking of rest for your soul, the hope for fulfillment- can only be satisfied by the One who created you- the One who chose to reveal Himself to the world as Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, instead we often get lost in a sea of *"I want to get to this place in life, I need more money, I need to find what makes me happy, I need to find good friends, my schedule just needs to be overhauled, if only that person would say they're sorry, if I could just get rid of this bad habit, if only my spouse would..."* And Jesus is over here calling out *"Do you know why your heart is really restless? Have you thought about who it is you are really seeking?"* Look at Mary's response again, [verse 15](#)...

Look at what's going on here. The problem is, or at least what Mary *thinks* the problem is, is that someone took Jesus, which then resulted in her not knowing what was going on, crushing her expectations, causing emotional trauma. Look at who she slightly casts the blame to- to Jesus Himself! It's like she says *"I am upset because someone crushed my expectations and that someone just might be you, gardener man."* That's interesting because we actually often do the same thing. We miss the deeper root problem, and just skip ahead to placing the surface-problem-blame onto others, and quite often we place the blame on God Himself. *"God if you just hadn't let that happen, if only you would do this miracle in my life, if only you would make things easier, why won't you allow me to achieve this thing..."* And we place the blame of our negative experiences and sentiments on the very one who wants to help us process those experiences and sentiments.

Not only does she unknowingly question/accuse Jesus, her solution is that if He indeed is responsible, she will then go and get the body, attempting to fix the situation, attempting to handle this surface level problem on her own. Can you imagine Mary being able to handle a dead man's corpse on her own, by herself, anyway? Mary's reaction is so true to our human nature, we often want to blame God, and then resort to fixing the problem our self. God sees us in our self-absorption, He sees us in our hurt, He sees us in our fears and He is calling out

“Do you know the true source of your hurt? Who is it that you are desiring?” And often our response is “God, You allowed this bad thing to happen, so I might not be able to trust You. I tried You and You let me down. I’m going to take steps on my own apart from You to try to help myself.” And in His mercy, He attempts to snap us out of it, saying “Mary!” “Wes!” “Dave!” “Wake up, it’s me! You are weeping, you are hurt, fearful, stressed because you need more of Me! It is Me you are longing for! I am not the source of your hurt, I am the answer to your hurt- I am life’s answer you are looking for!”

Mary didn’t recognize Him at first, as He had a new body- just as we, along with all the rest of His followers, will be given a new, repaired, fresh body when we are resurrected. But she recognized His voice when He personally called her name. Often, we miss and don’t recognize Jesus’ movement, His working, His presence. We often blame Him for what appears to be bad, only to later realize that it was Him working actually for our good. And He is calling out to each of us individually, asking us to recognize Him as the loving, healing, forgiving Jesus that we know Him to be in our heart of hearts.

Look again at Mary’s response to Jesus calling out her name, in [verse 16](#), she responds “Rabboni!” meaning “Teacher!” She could have responded “Lord!”, or “Jesus!” but instead she calls out “Teacher!” As we sort through our heartaches, and we answer the question of what and who it is we are seeking, our response to Jesus’ personal revelation to us must be *“Teacher! Teach me. Jesus, take the position of teacher in my life! Show me the root issues, instruct me in how to deal with them, help me to know You are not the source of the problem but You are the source of the healing, teach me how to hope in You alone.”*

In between verses 16 and 17 it appears Mary embraces Jesus, or is bowed at His feet clasping onto Him, and Jesus says in [verse 17](#)... Many have wrestled with the reason Jesus said these words to Mary, some have suggested a close embrace would have been inappropriate between a glorified-body-Jesus and a tainted-by-the-world Mary, but that conclusion doesn’t really make sense- if Jesus was somehow tainted by Mary’s clinging He would have prevented her from doing it altogether, not just stopped her after the fact. Some might suppose that *anyone* touching Him in *any* way would have been inappropriate- but later Jesus tells Thomas to touch his hands and side. I think what makes the most sense is that Jesus was bringing some sort of closure to that moment of processing emotions.

We commended Mary earlier for not being in a rush, for absorbing the heaviness, and doing the heart introspection that gave way to Jesus engaging with her. But after taking time to process emotions, there comes a time to move on. There was mission, purpose, destiny for her to move on into from her pain. She was to be the very mouthpiece that announced the good news of Jesus' life, and thus the hope of life for all of mankind. Jesus tells her, *"Stop clinging, and go tell my brothers I'm alive and I'm ascending to the Father that is also your Father, to my God that is also your God."* And the very next [verse 18](#), says...

Isn't that a picture of what our engagement with Jesus looks like as well? We're to bask in His presence, embracing, clinging to Him, sharing intimate moments with Him, meeting with Him intensely up on the mountain top, but then He sends us down into the valley to be on mission for Him- we are to announce to others that He is very much alive and that His Father can be their Father, and that even from the place in Heaven He has ascended to, He is still calling out and seeking relationship with every person in this world.

Perhaps too, Jesus, in telling her to stop clinging and then immediately saying He was going to ascend to the Father- perhaps in that, He was bringing some closure also to the physical aspect of His relationship with men and women. He was moving Mary on to the idea that He would be present with her in a different way- that she would need to learn to embrace Him *spiritually* rather than *physically*. She would need to learn to engage with Jesus in a spiritual manner, as you and I are learning to engage with Him, being that He (for the time being) does not walk among us in physical flesh.

Maybe even right now, you are hearing Jesus call your name- not in a physical audible voice, but in a spiritual, quiet voice inside, tugging on your heart in some way. I hope that you sense His desire to address with you any confusion, doubt, fear, hurt, stress that you might be experiencing. I want you to think about a negative sentiment or challenge you have experienced recently, or are currently experiencing. Think about your reaction, your emotion, and think about the situation that appears to have caused that reaction and emotion. Take a moment and think about that challenge, or challenges, you are facing. If it helps, you can bow your head and close your eyes. Whether the thing you are processing has been caused by others, or has been caused by past personal mistakes, or whether it is a result of us living in a fallen world- Jesus wants to help you walk through

this thing. I challenge you to ask yourself, and prayerfully ask God, *“What aspect of this situation does Jesus want me to see that I am not currently seeing?”* Go ahead and even do that now, I’ll give you a few moments to process that. And then I want you to follow up that question with *“To whom, to where, to what, am I seeking resolution?”* This might be an opportunity to repent of not seeking first the Lord concerning your situation, or maybe it’s an opportunity to remind yourself and renew your trust in Him afresh. Either way, may you hear Him speaking to you, guiding you, and strengthening you in the mission and purpose He has for you.