

Seeing Jesus
4-8-18
By John Diehl

John 20:13-16

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.” 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”).

Message:

So, did you ever misplace something and after searching for it for a long time, come to realize that it is laying right in plain site, where as my Mom used to say – if it had teeth it would have bit you! I want you to think for a moment about what that feeling is like. At first, you’re probably saying to yourself – you dope! It’s right there!. Then you become cognizant of the fact that if someone were watching you or if you had made the mistake of telling someone what you were looking for, you’d probably be a bit embarrassed by how you’d missed something so obvious (‘anyone seen my wallet?). But in the end, aren’t you somewhat relieved, even if a little frustrated with yourself and a bit embarrassed by how obvious it was, that you actually found what you were looking for?

Well, OK, it’s one thing to misplace a thing. But how many of you have ever misplace a person??? True story here. Many years ago, when the kids were young, Lisa and I had the opportunity to travel to Rome with our young family on one of my business trips. At the time, Sam was just a baby, which would have made Anna 2-3 years old, and Emily would have been 5 or 6. Because we didn’t want our youngsters to be a distraction to my clients who were also on the trip, Lisa and I made connection through one of my acquaintances with a private licensed tour guide from Rome, who had his own little mini-van, who would shuttle us around for two of the days we were there – so that we wouldn’t have to take the kids on the group tours that the others on the trip were taking. One of the first stops we made was Vatican City to tour the Vatican Museum, St. Peter’s

Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, of course. It was a long morning, and when we finally exited St. Peter's Basilica, out into the main courtyard of the Vatican, like where the worshippers watch the pope give that little pope wave from his window, the courtyard was a crush of people. So now, I'm taking mental count of the family. Lets see – Lisa has Sam in the backpack, there's Emily, she has Lisa's hand. Oh no, where is Anna? I spin around to see if I see her amongst the throng of people – no where. LISA! LISA! Have you seen Anna????? Is she with you? OK, you're not gonna believe this - the look on Lisa's face – not of fear, not of despair, but maybe better described as disbelief when she just looked at me and put her index finger up in the air. Anna was on my shoulders. OK, like I said, it was a long day. But yes, I tell you that story to tell you that it can happen with people too. And those feelings of how much of a dope you are? The embarrassment? The relief? All a little bit more intense than the misplacing of things!

So why did I ask you those things and tell you my story? Stories are fun, but they're also illustrative. And the best stories, the ones that really get my attention and I'm guessing yours as well – are the ones where someone either says or intimates – Ready, you're not gonna believe this. There are many things in the Bible that fit in this amazing but true category and particularly, there are some things in the post-resurrection story in the Bible, that I find particularly interesting – and particularly informative. This morning, I want to share some thoughts with you about these accounts. They all deal with followers of Jesus, in fact, some of his closest followers, that upon meeting him after his resurrection – in fact, in most cases actually talking to him – that didn't even recognize him even when they were sitting there next to him! This morning, I want to recount the stories of Mary Magdalene, as well as the disciples Thomas and Peter. We'll look at how they met up with Jesus, perhaps some of the reasons why they didn't recognize him and how Jesus came to be recognized. And in their experiences, maybe discover a couple of things we may need to keep in mind when perhaps we “lose” Jesus in the midst of a crowded, jumbled up life of our own. And we also get to experience the joy at finding what they might have lost.

Let's Start with Mary Magdalene in John 20:11-18

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.” 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.

Important in the setting here was what Mary was doing at the beginning of the verse. What was Mary doing? She was crying. Mary represents those who are suffering from loss, those who are experiencing great sorrow. Yes, that may be the loss of a loved one, but it could also be someone grieving through the loss of a relationship, the loss of a job – anything that initiates the process of mourning and grieving. Mary was upset. I know it’s painful to think about, but take yourself to a time when you might have been in a similar state as Mary. All those voices in your head, all seemingly talking at once, presenting a myriad of questions – each of them overwhelming. “What do I do now?”, “What should I do next?”, “Why did this happen?”, “How did this happen?”, “Who can help me?” . . . the list goes on and on. In Mary’s case, it was the theft of the Body of Christ she adored “Where have they taken him”, “Why did they do that”, “Who did it?”, etc.

Sometimes in the midst of our grieving, we become so confused, so befuddled, so overwhelmed that we fail to recognize that Jesus is right there with us. Now when we read the story, don’t you feel yourself saying – Mary, come on, he’s sitting right in front of you! But how many times has Jesus been right there next to us, but we also failed to recognize Him! Mary has a million thoughts running through her mind, she’s distressed, Sir, if you’ve carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him. Jesus utters one word – he calls her by name “Mary”. Immediately upon hearing her name, Mary recognizes Jesus and cries out Rabboni! Can you imagine her excitement? Verse 18 tells us she went to the Disciples with the news – “You’re not gonna believe this” (and they probably didn’t) – I have seen the Lord!

In Mary's story, I'll submit that I think sorrow, grief and disappointment sometimes obscure our ability to see Jesus in our midst. If this can happen to Mary, one of Jesus' closest followers, no doubt it can happen to us. John 16:33 is the verse in which Jesus tells us that in this world, we will have troubles, but fear not, for he has overcome the world. What I hear the Lord telling me through the story of Mary Magdalene is that in the depths of our sorrow and hurt, we need to listen for the calming and reassuring voice of our Lord and Savior, who by just calling our name, imparts a peace for our souls. When we hear it, it is like a weight lifted from our shoulders – I'm sure some of you have experienced it, as have I. When I experience these time of grief, I recall the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 46:10 – Be still and know that I am God. He is in control. He loves you. Because he lives, you can face tomorrow! Mary Magdalene – vision clouded by mourning and sorrow – Jesus calls her name and she recognizes him – and what a story to tell – you're not gonna believe this.

Which takes us to my next person, speaking of 'believing' and this is the disciple "Thomas". Poor Thomas, the disciple who've we've all known from the bible stories as the one who doubted. In fact, even secularists use the title "Doubting Thomas", to describe someone who has little faith. But is that fair? In Thomas, I see an obstacle that obscures our recognition of Jesus that we call "logic". I know, I know, we can read the Bible today and we see how all the events of the Bible are all in beautiful alignment pointing to the need of Jesus our Savior and his redeeming act on the cross and what it meant for all mankind. But put yourself in the shoes of Thomas. I mean Thomas is a logical thinker. You might recall back in John 5, when Jesus was describing to the disciples about the Father's house that has many rooms, that Jesus is going to come back and take them with him and Jesus says "You know the way to the place that I'm going"., It's Thomas that pipes up and says "Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?" – Ah, a man after my own heart – practical thinker. If Jesus had just said 5th and Main, Thomas would have been there, but instead Jesus comes back with this "I am the Way, The Truth and the Life" . . . What is one supposed to do with that?

Well, in Thomas, I submit that sometimes the wisdom of the world or our expectations that have been shaped by the world, obscure our view of what Jesus is doing in our lives. Did you ever face a problem that seemed so overwhelming that after exhausting all of your options, maybe as a "last resort", you decide to pray about it – turn it over to God? And what comes in the ensuing days, weeks, months and years is an answer that you could have never cooked up in million years? How do you respond? "Well, that certainly was lucky"? Or do you respond by taking what happened, praising God, and coming up with a "You're never gonna believe this" . . . story to share with others?

Take Thomas, he's starting to hear these stories about a resurrected Jesus that is running into Mary Magdalene and giving her messages to take to the others. Then there's a group of disciples that says that they too have seen the Lord. But Thomas knows the anguish that they've gone through over the past several days – you know what's real to Thomas? The real body of Jesus that was hanging on the real cross on Golgotha. Can you really blame him? So what does Thomas say in John 20:20-24?

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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."

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!"

Thomas, the voice of logic, the voice of the 'real world' says Unless I see the nail marks and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

I love how Jesus responds to the person of logic, to the person of the real world – Try Me! Try Me! The scripture tells us that Jesus instructs Thomas to "Reach out". Jesus is waiting for us to Reach Out and touch him. How many times have you heard all the logical refutations of biblical truth? 1. World couldn't be made in a week and science says it's XXXX millions of year old 2. Virgin Birth 3. Resurrection, on and on and on. Folks, you want to get into a pointless discussion with someone of no faith, just begin a debate on doctrinal beliefs. You want to change someone's life? Share your personal story of how you reached out for Jesus and experienced something that this world will never be able to explain.

I love listening to your stories that Curtis is encouraging everyone to share. They are emotional, they are empowering, they are amazing – and what makes them so engaging is that they often incorporate a "You're not gonna believe this" moment. And you know what – the hearer of your story may choose not to believe it, but you what else??? It doesn't matter! You know your story, and you know the Truth

of when you reached out to touch Jesus and in turn he reached out and touched YOU!!! It is truly a beautiful thing.

Remember, 1Corinthians 1:27 tells us But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

To the person who's view is obstructed by logic, by human reasoning, by practical thinking, Jesus responds "Try me". And how does Thomas respond? "My Lord and My God". I find that those who are most strongly entrenched in their humanist views often become some of the most avid evangelists once they recognize that Jesus has been there all along.

My last example, you might have guessed already – is the disciple Peter. Yes, Peter, one of Christ's closest followers, one of the first, one who was there every step of the way. Yes, the one who denied knowing Jesus at the time when Jesus most desperately needed him. In Peter, we find that guilt and fear often keep us from recognizing Jesus. On the night of Jesus crucifixion, Peter, upon being pressed, disavows knowing Jesus to 'save his own skin'. Again I ask, what would I have done? I wonder what Peter thought in the days that followed? Jesus was crucified, dead. Peter believed in him, sought to defend him, eventually denied him. How did he feel? Was he desparately disappointed in himself? The Bible tells us that upon denying that he knew Jesus the third time, he immediately heard a rooster crow. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows you will disown me three times". And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter didn't want to do it. Peter didn't mean to do it. Jesus told Peter that he would do it and Peter did it. Sound familiar? How many times have we felt like we have let Jesus down. All of us gathered here today are sinners, so obviously you let Jesus down. But if we let that guilt or disappointment distance us from Jesus, we are making a bigger mistake. Jesus died on the cross knowing that we would sin. His sacrifice is there for our acceptance.

John 21:3-14 tells the story this way

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.[a] It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go

with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

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.[c] 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Interesting that at first, the disciples did not realize it was Jesus. Then he tell them where to throw their net and they’re unable to haul it in – and then the light bulb goes off. But Peter isn’t the one who recognizes him. But upon hearing it’s Jesus, jumps in the water to get to him. A chance to make amends? And what does Jesus suggest they do? Sit down and have a meal together, be with one another. But after this, and beyond the scope of my message today is what is known as the Reinstatement of Peter. It was the process by which Peter reconfirms his love of the Lord, Jesus accepts and then commissions Peter to go forth. But the notion does enter my mind – what if Peter jumped in the boat and paddled the other way. Or maybe sunk way down in the boat trying to avoid Jesus? What if Peter ran from Jesus? Well, throughout the Bible we’ve seen many use this tactic, beginning with, well, Adam hiding his nakedness, and it usually doesn’t work out as planned, so I’m guessing Jesus would have pursued him anyway, but how many do we

know that are avoiding a relationship with Christ because they feel like they “really messed up” or aren’t worthy to approach Christ to ask forgiveness. How many try to tell themselves that what they did or doing isn’t really a sin (we call that rationalizing) because the process of confessing and asking forgiveness is much more difficult than denying sin in the first place?

Peter’s story is one of restoration. Restoration from guilt and disappointment in one’s self. Guilt can blind us from Jesus presence. But how does Jesus restore Peter? By having a good old fashioned sit down over a meal, talking through where they are **RIGHT THERE AT THAT MOMENT**. They reaffirm their love for one another and then Jesus uses two words to guide those of us stricken by guilt and disappointment. “Follow Me”. Yes, Jesus instructs Peter that despite what may have happened in the past, Peter is to follow Him. It’s not always going to be a rosy path, but it is the right path. Imagine the relief that Peter must have felt, in fact, not just relief but energy as he began to tell everyone around him “You’re not going to believe what happened to me” – and he did – just keep reading into Acts! If a disciple as close to Jesus as Peter can fail as epically as he did and still find himself firmly in the grip of the love of Christ, then you and I—when we doubt or when we struggle or when we fear or even when we fail—will not be separated from His love either.

Kind of reminds me of the woman that Jesus saved from being stoned for her alleged adultery. Remember? They were in a ring ready to stone her and Jesus told them to let the one without sin to cast the first stone? Do you remember what Jesus told her after everyone had bailed? “Woman, where are they, has no one condemned you?”. She said “No one sir”. And Jesus said “Neither do I condemn you, Go your way and sin no more”.

To those held captive by sin and guilt and shame, Jesus says “Follow me” and offers pardon and acceptance.

Three close followers of Christ – all of whom had trouble recognizing Jesus in their midst. One due to sorry, one due to human perception and one due to guilt. But Jesus calls their name, reaches out to them and offers forgiveness and acceptance. In doing so, these followers are compelled to reach out to as many as they can to begin a story with “You’re not gonna believe this”! Have you ever thought of your own story in these terms? Christ may be nearer than you think.

Amen