

Easter Sunday 2020 - John 20:1-18

“Who is it that you’re seeking?”

1. A dark Sunday morning.

It's Sunday morning. It's dark. A woman stumbles across unfamiliar landscape, but it's a path she's been aching to take for the last couple of days. Desperate to return to the place where a corpse was laid. The body of her Lord and master. In a borrowed garden tomb.

Who knows what she was planning to do when she got there? It was only on Friday she saw the boulder rolled across the entrance.

Did she think she could move it herself?

In her grief, it's the last thing she thinks of.

But through the gloom she makes out... the stone's been moved, the tomb is open. A small relief. But relief turns to panic - the tomb' open – somebody's taken His body.

Well let's read the story shall we. You can read along in your own bible, on the service sheet, or on screen.

Bible – John 20:1-18

Pray

Was it not enough they'd killed him –an innocent man. Couldn't they just leave him in peace? Give the few friends he had left a moment to pay their respects. This poor woman – Mary is her name – Mary of Magdala, Mary Magdalene.

Her life had been tied to this man, so now she's lost everything.

She doesn't stop to investigate. She rushes straight to Peter and John – two of her travelling companions - also in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Like her, they're in shock.

Through tears she blurts - “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!”

The men are stunned, but they check her story. The body of Jesus isn't there. But what's more strange, the clothes He was wrapped in – they've been neatly folded and placed.

They both know there's more to this than meets the eye – but then they just return to the guest house.

But Mary stays.

First grief, then frustration, but now - she's bewildered.

And as she weeps she bends down to confirm what her friends have just told her – but she's greeted by something quite different. Two men, who asked a strange question - it seemed to her.

“Why are you crying?” She tells them what she first told Peter and John. "I don't know where they've put Him."

And there's another man behind her now – outside. It's no-one she recognises. "Dear Woman" which I think is how you could translate v15.

Like men in the tomb, he's polite, but why do they all ask the same question? “Why are you crying?”

Don't they know what's happened?

And then another odd question from this man outside.

“Who is it that you're seeking?”

2. Mary, who is it that you're seeking?

“Who is it that you're seeking?” Who are you looking for? Who *is* Mary looking for?

Friends, she's looking for the man who gave her a purpose – who gave her....life.

Let's take a flashback.

She first saw Him back home in Galilee. Life at the time for her was something like hell. She was possessed. Under the control of demons. Was was probably shunned by all but her family's closest friends.

Until she met *Him*. By his own authority, he commanded the evil spirits within to leave, and they simply obeyed. And then she knew freedom. Not just from that dark bondage but a freedom of peace – that came with His presence.

And the direction of her life from then on was this – wherever He went – she followed. She's one of several women who, over three years, travel with and support this man, Jesus, and His closest disciples.

She's there as He heals others with the same compassion and authority that freed her. She hangs off every word of his teaching. "I am the Good Shepherd - I lay down my life for the sheep." She doesn't always understand it.

But she knows the trouble His teaching and miracles get him into. Many oppose him. Who could know why. She wondered at the time where it would all end up.

But now, on this bleak Sunday morning, the answer's all too clear. How *could* it go so horribly wrong?

Just two days before she'd witnessed the horrific crucifixion of the man who had rescued so many. He'd always been in control, but now He was the one who needed rescue...and none came.

At the end of it all she saw where they laid his body.

And now who was Mary seeking? A dead man. A dead savior. She'd lost more than a teacher – because his teachings made no sense without him. They were so often about himself. Who he was, what he'd come to do.

He'd said "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live*"

and then he'd raised a man from the dead. But what could that mean now? Now that Jesus himself was dead?

He wasn't just a teacher to her, she thought she'd found *the* Messiah. Yes, he had healed the *her* brokenness, but surely he was the one to heal the brokenness of the whole world – surely this one was the promised one.

He'd said "*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life*" and she'd **seen** that light – she thought.

So who is it she's seeking? Well, no longer a Messiah, but the memory of one. The one that carried her hopes and dreams with him....to the grave. His death now mocked those hopes and dreams, death even mocked her tears.

So with all that going on, the man's questions....they sound almost cruel.

"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" They're salt in the wounds aren't they?

Unless he knows something she doesn't. Why do you think he's asking? Of course it's Jesus, risen from the dead, so it's not like he doesn't know the answer.

"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?"

Mary....Mary, you were devoted to him - far, far more than most. You were the first one at the tomb to show your devotion, to pour out your grief at the loss. With the death of Jesus, you feel you, yourself have died.

But Mary. Even *you've* missed the truth.

Yes, of course you were right to devote yourself to him.

But...all the wonderful things you thought he was - He was infinitely more. Of course he was the Messiah – but that title means so much more than even *you've* realised.

Dear, dearest woman, why are you crying? By now you could be rejoicing. You should be rejoicing.

Friends, that's what's behind Jesus' question.

Who is it that you're seeking? Mary, with all hope gone, you're seeking a few more precious moments with your dead would-be saviour. And that would be good and right and healthy. If he *was* dead.

But Mary, right now you think your hopes are dashed, but they're not.

Your Hopes and dreams – of the satisfaction, peace, contentment and purpose you found when Jesus met you.

But they're all perfectly safe - right now - in Jesus' vault.

What you imagined Jesus to be - it was far too small. Couldn't he do all the things he promised? Didn't you believe he willingly died to take the punishment for sins of his people – including you? Did you not believe he would rise, conquering death - just like he said he would?

Oh Mary, what grief you could have been spared.

But it's ok, Mary – few had your devotion to Jesus, but **no one** truly understood him.

So Mary was seeking someone in whom she thought she'd found life and she was right.

She didn't fully understand him, but she'd put all her hope in him.

She was convinced he was the Messiah, though she didn't know all that title *really* meant.

And now Mary hears the most wonderful sound she could imagine– her own name from His lips.

“Mary.”

3. Who is it that **you're** seeking?

3(a)

Well that's Mary, now what about you?

Who is it that you're seeking? Who are you looking for?

Where are you going to find life? Where might you look to give life a purpose? To find satisfaction, fulfillment, peace. A peace unshakable - even by a virus that's brought the world to it's knees.

It is another person? Your mum? Your dad? Your girlfriend, boyfriend? Your soul mate? Family? Grandkids?

Or perhaps the person you'll find life in is - you. You'll find life's purpose for yourself – in toys, hobbies, a secure house? Job satisfaction? School or career achievements? Moving into a contented retirement? Which then settles hopefully into a peaceful old age?

Perhaps a fulfilled life has different flavour for you. Caring for your fellowman or the environment.

But friends, I need to tell you today, wherever you are seeking life, you have an enemy that's going to make a mockery of your search.

And the deeper you plunge into that thing to find life, the louder this enemy will mock.

It will mock your every attempt to find meaning in life.

Friends, that enemy is death. Death takes with it the loved one you thought you'd found life in. Death mocks everything you achieved for yourself and anyone else. Death is the enemy of your relationships, your achievements, your possessions.

But why talk about death today? Isn't Easter Sunday supposed to be a happy day? Mary's just discovered Jesus is alive.

Friends, Mary Magdalene helps us think wisely about death. She's put all her hopes in the only place where death cannot mock those hopes. She'd placed them in the one who conquered death. And He conquers death for all those who put their hope in him.

Mary approached the tomb with the voice of death mocking her last three years of hope. Little did she know, she'd put that hope in the *only* place.

Friends, she would ask us what Jesus asked her - Who is it that **you're** seeking?

Friend, can I beg you, don't seek life in anyone else but Jesus Christ. He is the only safe place from death.

3(b)

But perhaps you have place your hopes, your life, in this Jesus. That's is wonderful.

But can I urge to keep seeking him?

Mary found what she'd been looking for in Jesus, years before in Galilee. But her vision of him was too small wasn't it?

And so is mine, so is yours.

We still need to seek to know Christ better. The person. What it means to take him at his word and live like it. What it means to walk with him. What it means

to keep placing our hope in him. What it means to be weaned off those other things where we think we'll find life – find fulfillment.

Has Covid unexpectedly given you a lot more free time? Where did your instincts take you when you thought about how you'd use it.

Friends, we need to feel what it means for Jesus to be like the distant lover.

One who you long to be reunited to.

Do you long to be with him?

Do you think that sounds a bit sentimental –Friends, fellowship with God through Jesus, it's what we were made for. Fellowship with him, uninterrupted by the threat of death. This is the only place, the only one in whom you'll find fulfillment, peace, contentment.

Who is it that you're **seeking**?