

EASTER SUNDAY – WEEK OF 4 APRIL 2021  
THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE  
SCRIPTURE: JOHN 20:1-18

**Context:**

On Easter Sunday (Resurrection Sunday), we remember and declare that Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! What meaning and significance do we give to Christ's resurrection? Whether we are facing challenging circumstances because of the pandemic, loss of our routines, financial stability, loss of the way things used to be, perhaps loss of a loved one, or dark and despairing circumstances, Christ's resurrection brings us hope that in Him is the victory over death and power to give life, here, now and forever more.

Read John 20:1-18

**Core Questions for Discussion**

1. Read John 20:1-9 out loud. What do you think is going through the minds of the disciples at this time:
  - a. Mary
  - b. Peter
  - c. John
  - d. Which of these might you associate with right now?
    - Each disciple may have had a pre-disposed notion of what they expected to see when they arrived at the tomb, partly from what was said to them by Mary. While much of what you may discuss are just assumptions and opinions, we can derive from these 9 verses some possibly fairly useful lessons.
    - To some extent, there may be a bit of each disciple's mind in each of us.
    - Mary:
      - a. Distraught, very sad, wanting the return of the body of her Lord; recruited the other disciples, possibly to help her find the body.

- b. She probably, at this stage, just wanted the body, she wanted to tend to Jesus' body.
  - c. Some of us may want to fix things within the order of what they should appear to be. Life is already tough enough, can we just try to work within the circumstance of where we find ourselves? For Mary, what was in front of her was the need to tend to Jesus' body. The problem: the body was missing.
- Peter:
  - a. Running, rushed into the tomb even though he was not the first to arrive, did not hesitate to go in, and saw what was laid out. Yet he still did not understand (v.9)
  - b. He wanted to find out and see for himself what he had heard from the women.
  - c. Some of us may be in the situation where we just want to move on, get to the next step or season or thing in life. We are in a rush, there is no time to pause or consider.
- John:
  - a. Ran and outran Peter, but paused at the entrance of the tomb, did not rush in, but when he did go in, "He saw and believed." (v.8)
  - b. Why did he pause? Was he already on the journey of faith, believing in what Jesus had said before? So that when he entered and saw the empty tomb, he was ready to believe.
  - c. Some of us may be in a situation where we, like Peter, are rushing to get to our next season or thing in life, but we ought to remember to pause as John did, to gather our thoughts and reflect on what we have observed? To perhaps reflect on what God might have shown to us before, then enter the situation or circumstance, ready to see and believe.

2. The significance of Easter is the resurrection of Jesus. As Christians, we need to believe that Jesus has been resurrected and is risen. Do you believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead? Why do you believe this?

- This question seeks to provide an opportunity for the group to share their understanding of the resurrection and whether they actually believe in it.
- Rev Wendy Watson shared (Easter Sunday, 2021), the resurrection is difficult to understand. It is one thing to say that Jesus is alive, but quite another to explain His resurrection.
- As the title of this study states: "That You May Believe", the discussion should focus on how and why we believe.
- There are several books that can help those who have questions about the resurrection of Christ:

"To preach Christianity meant (to the Apostles) primarily to preach the Resurrection. ... The Resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reported in the Acts. The Resurrection, and its consequences, were the 'gospel' or good news which the Christians brought."  
 (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, ch. 16)

- a. *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, by Lee Strobel
  - b. *Surprised by Hope*, and *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, by N.T. Wright (note that the latter is extremely comprehensive at more than 800 pages)
  - c. *Jesus Resurrection: Fact or Fiction*, by Paul Copan & Ronald Tacelli
  - d. *Did the Resurrection Happen? A Conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew*
  - e. *Evidence for the Resurrection*, by Josh & Sean McDowell
  - f. *The Resurrection of the Son of God Incarnate*, by Richard Swinburne
- There are several pieces of evidence for the resurrection:
    - a. Eye witness accounts by the women and disciples to the empty tomb on the Sunday after the crucifixion. The former is especially relevant since in that time and culture, women were not considered reliable witnesses, and hence a fabricated story would want to not include them as eye-witnesses.
    - b. Testimony of people, particularly the disciples of their experience with the risen Christ, talking with him, eating with him, etc.; and
    - c. Jesus' resurrection occurred in a most unexpected way. The resurrection accounts did not draw on Old Testament imagery of the glorious dead shining as a star (cf. Daniel 12:2-3) nor alluded to other Old Testament texts. Also, later New Testament imagery of the future resurrection of all believers is not referred to in the resurrection accounts. Further, the then-contemporary view was that martyrs would be with God spiritually in an immaterial manner and be raised only at the end of time. But instead, the resurrection stories portray Jesus as bodily and physically raised, in the 'middle-of-time' – quite unlike the expected cultural narrative. Taken together, all these suggest that the resurrection narratives were not simply imaginative writing which drew on contemporary themes and popular hopes, but resulted from a mind-blowing occurrence that was totally outside the religious expectations of the time.
    - d. The testimony and preaching of the resurrection, which was the central theme of the "good news" established the church and contributed to its growth even in the midst of persecution – a testimony that the Apostles were willing to die for. Further, a number of those who later proclaimed Jesus' resurrection were originally skeptics, such as James the brother of Jesus. Something truly significant must have happened to cause them to change their minds.
  - For some of us, all it takes is one piece of evidence. It could be the testimony of others. It could be our faith in the Bible. It could be our personal experience of Christ – maybe even unexplainable. Or it could be a combination of all.
  - In the end, it is not science or history or evidence which draws one to God. These are important in addressing and removing potential hindrances to faith in Christ, but it is the Holy Spirit who brings the light of truth.
  - Ultimately, our understanding is a journey, but our faith requires a decision of trust. And we can choose to have faith and believe and trust, even when, in the inherent limitation of our finite minds, we do not have full understanding.

- We also need to ask: so what? What is the significance, what is the implication of Jesus' resurrection? It is more than just another a miracle. The article "Historical Evidence for the Resurrection" by Matt Perman gives a good summary both of the evidence for, as well as the crucial implications of the Resurrection. (See <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection>).

3. What does Resurrection Sunday mean to you? (John 20:10-17)

- As we remember Christ's resurrection, the word "hope" should be foremost in our thoughts. However, this may not be the case for everyone.

"Weep" at verse 11:  
 Greek: *klaiō*  
 Strong's definition: Of uncertain affinity; to sob, that is, wail aloud  
 Strong's G6299  
<https://studybible.info/strongs/G2799>

- At vv.10-15, we see Mary weeping (or wailing) for her loss and grief.

Even the sight of the two angels in white could not move her from her single minded desire to find Jesus' body. Even when Jesus appears, she mistakes Him for the gardener.

- Perhaps some are staring intently at the problem at hand, so much so, they are not able to see the angels or Jesus.
- At v.11, Mary looks from outside, into the tomb. The darkness of the tomb must have been quite stark in contrast to the bright light outside. Perhaps for some, their situation is bleak and they are peering into the darkness and helplessness. There seems to be no solution.
- For us all, let us instead listen to and hear the voice of Jesus calling us by name, just as He did with Mary. (v. 16)
- Resurrection Sunday brings a message of hope in a risen Christ who calls us by name, loves us and wants us to "hold on" to Him as He is now with the Father. (v.17) For Christ has returned to His Father, our Father, to His God, our God (v.17)
- Let us be like Mary, spreading the news that we have "seen the Lord" ... leading to the next question

4. Would you be willing to share with one person the meaning of Easter and the good news that Christ is risen? Try sharing this Easter story (John 20:1-17) in your own words?

- Encourage your group to break into pairs or in threes, to share the Easter story in their own words to one another. Let them have as a backdrop the hope that they believe in the risen Christ.

Prayer Suggestions

5. Would you consider praying for:

- a. An open door, an opportunity to share the Easter story with one person.  
Would you ask God to reveal whom that person might be? Would you pray for that person by name and make an appointment to meet with that person this week.
  
- b. Good soil in that person to receive the good news and hope of the risen Christ.