

On Feb. 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, a mother received a message from the Pentagon stating her son had stepped on a land mine in Kuwait & was dead. She later wrote, *"I can't begin to describe my grief & shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger & loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great."* But three days later the telephone rang, a voice on the other end said, *"Mom, it's me. I'm alive."* Apparently, it was all a mistake.

We have another woman who experienced this same loss over 3 days in Scripture. It was on a dark morning, before the sun came up. Mary Magdalene, the woman whom Jesus had driven 7 spirits from, made her way to his tomb. She missed him; she wanted to pay her respects. She was in mourning. Three days before they'd crucified him. She'd stood by & watched as others scattered. She loved him. Her connection wasn't coldly religious, it was relational. She knew him. Walked with him. Experienced life with him. She listened to his teaching. Talked with him. Ate with him. Served his needs. They'd grown close. Her loss was great. She didn't just miss a great teacher... on him all her hopes were hung. He was her promise. A promise emptied of its power - he was dead. She must've been questioning the reality of God altogether.

In her day religious leadership undervalued female contribution. Jesus showed her love & respect. He forgave her. Healed her. Taught her. He included women in his illustrations. A woman searching for a lost coin as a parable for God's search for his lost people. He demanded the same standards from both sexes. Mary, the first person to be witness to the resurrected Jesus is female.

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, & they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter & reached the tomb first.

Its comical that John, being the author, points out that he outran Peter, and also refers to himself as ‘the one whom Jesus loved’.

⁵ and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ (Simon Peter always the lug barreling through) and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. (Apparently Jesus’ mom taught him well to fold his clothes)

⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first (There it is again, the little dig from John), also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

So, Mary shows up, then runs to get these guys, and even though they knew the Scriptures, and had been told directly by Jesus this would happen, they didn’t expect it, let alone believe it. The guys leave...

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, (Not presbyterian weeping, this was Jewish woman weeping, there’s a difference!) and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head & one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” (sort of impersonal, ‘woman’, but I am sure they said it nicely) She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around & saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. (Possibly it was still dark, and she had tears in her eyes) ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

Jesus even uses the term ‘woman’ at first, and asks the question he’s asked so many...Whom are you seeking? Which reminds us of Proverbs where it says ¹⁷I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently

*find me.*¹ Sometimes people mistakenly may ask themselves, *what am I seeking in life. But the real question should be, who are we seeking?*

*Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”*¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, “Mary.”*

Now he gets personal, calling her by name - his sheep he knows by name & when he calls them they answer.

*She turned & said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). (actually great teacher)*¹⁷ *Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, (She apparently does what any Jewish woman would do, throwing out all decorum, lunging at his feet) for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers (He had called these guys servants (John 13:16), disciples & friends (John 15:15), but now He calls them brothers. The same guys who pretty much all deserted him. This meant that they shared His resurrection power & glory.*² *Hebrews 5:11 says, ¹¹ For he who sanctifies & those who are sanctified all have one source. He’s not ashamed to call them brothers) & say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father & your Father, to my God & your God.’ ” (notice again, how everything gets personal, my father, your father, my God, your God - this is all family talk, something has switched in Jesus language, something has happened as a result of the crucifixion & resurrection)*¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene went & announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” — and that he had said these things to her.*³

She'd found who she was looking for! She has her Jesus back, the promise wasn't empty after all - because the tomb was! The hope of the Gospel is that Jesus empowers us to live the Kingdom of God. So the question when we're feeling hopeless is whom do you seek? Since it's the person of Jesus who brings hope, life & power to us. However, most people just seek the *what* in life, positive life change through behavioral modification, activity,

¹ *The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Pr 8:17). Wheaton: St &ard Bible Society.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Jn 20:11). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

³ *The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Jn 20:1–18). Wheaton: St &ard Bible Society.

materialism, or some ritualistic practice. Things which always fail & leave us hopeless.

Typically when thinking about the 'disciples' we think of men. However, after the resurrection the female disciples are together with the men, praying, electing a new apostle (Acts 1:12–26), and receiving the power & gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:17–18) as well. Acts & the epistles mention many women playing a full part in the church. Dorcas, who cared for so many, was raised from the dead by Peter (Acts 9:36-43). Lydia, the businesswoman, is Paul's first convert in Europe. Priscilla, with Aquila, taught the gifted Apollos. Philip's four daughters prophesied. Paul mentions many women workers, including Phoebe the deacon & Junia (now widely admitted to be a female name) who, with Andronicus, was prominent among the apostles (Rom. 16:1, 7). Unlike circumcision, the sign of baptism was for women as well as men. Paul stressed the church as a community without prejudice based on race, class, or gender; '*all are one in Christ Jesus*' (Gal. 3:28).⁴

What Jewish writer seeking to convince his readers of a made up story would use a single woman with a sordid past as the first witness to the resurrected Jesus? None. Not when witnesses to everything came in twos, and they were usually men since a woman's testimony was worth far less than a mans. **It reeks of authenticity & tells us Jesus brought change.**

As a result of Jesus, things changed for women, and continue to change. He brought balance to our social order. He changed the way we view the poor, class structures, & everything else. As a result of his teaching, we'll never look at the world the same way again. But did he just come to change or challenge social mores? Did he just come to make us better people? To give women the respect they deserved & say nice pithy things like love your neighbor as yourself? The answer is no. He came to usher in the kingdom of God. It's true, things change even now as a result of his kingdom. In Jesus we have the wise counsel of his words & actions, how he treated people, how he lifted up the Law of God, how he healed, and wept & struggled for others. How he was always telling us what the

⁴ Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (1246–1247). Leicester, Engl &; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

kingdom is like, what it can, and will be. He taught us how to live. He brought change.

When the kingdom comes, love comes. Grace comes. Justice comes for all the oppressed & downtrodden. From the poor, to those trafficked for the lusts of others, to the modern day slave across the world, and also for you & me here in Ardmore. We're called to engage in life through the teachings of Jesus & the whole counsel of Scripture. His Church, both corporate & local as a model of the kingdom come now, while waiting for its fullness to be established! It changes how we live & treat each other. We find it in his words & deeds. In the Beatitudes. All we have to do is read to find evidence of the kingdom of God. The kingdom means the forever rule of a gracious god over his creation. Jesus referred to it, practiced it, preached it, healed, taught, & challenged towards it. He brought change, yes.

But Jesus didn't just come to bring societal change; to teach us how to be good people. To just better our social systems. Or to teach us the right way to live. That wouldn't be sustainable. It would have no power. Human nature would always undermine good intentions. Jesus words are not healthy principles to live by - they're impossible to live by! **Thankfully he came to bring reconciliation power to live the kingdom. He came to open the way of reconciliation finally, once & for all to God; salvation. He came to empower his people to kingdom work through the HS.** Before the resurrection, Israel had the Temple which housed the Ark of the Covenant; which interestingly can also be translated as 'coffin'. That golden box which carried certain items; the gold jar of manna, Aaron's budding staff, and the two stone tablets of Moses. It's described in Hebrews 9:1-10.

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship & an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lamp stand & the table & the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense & the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶ *These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself & for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts & sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food & drink & various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*

So, here we have the picture of the Temple, and the ongoing sacrifices which were in place to pay for/atone for the peoples rebellion, sin, and separation from a holy God. Why? Because God is holy. Holiness & sin cannot co-mingle; oil & water. God isn't against us, however he cannot co-mingle without our sin being atoned for. Yet, God loved his people to open the way, the judgement of a holy god against sin had to be paid for with blood. It was sort of impersonal & formal, someone else goes in for you once a year. They stand before the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat on top. There the presence of the Lord met the high priest in his ritual, and that is where atonement was made with the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the Mercy Seat between the two golden angels bent towards the center. But Scripture is clear, this was all provisional, imperfect, a shadow of something to come in the future. **Hebrews 9 tells us what was to come...**

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater & more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats & calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats & bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (so without this blood of Jesus, our works are dead)

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has*

occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant...

²²Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. ²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. ⁵

Mary enters that tomb, and what does she see? ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head & one at the feet. Think about the Mercy Seat & the Cherubim facing each other at opposite ends of the Ark of the Covenant. Think about the fact that Ark can be translated Coffin. Think about the fact that Jesus is referred to as the High Priest coming into the Holy of Holies making the final sacrifice for us. That tomb had become the Holy of Holies. That slab of rock had become the Mercy Seat with two angels at either end. Jesus, had made the final sacrifice with his blood. In a very artistic show, God is saying to us, this is the Great High Priest, this is the final sacrifice. This is him where it says, ⁹ ...we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory & honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9).

And this all gets very personal for these disciples who've now become 'brothers'. This act of Jesus dying on the cross, and rising from the grave has shifted their reality - something powerfully changed. And now, those

⁵ *The Holy Bible : English Standard version.* 2001 (Heb 9:1–28). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

who were once maybe interested disciples, servants, and even friends, have become brothers! They're now ingrafted members of the family of God, once & for all. And although we do not have time to look at it all, they had become so empowered their demeanor changed drastically - many would go on to die for the name of Christ as a result. From cowards to brave men!

As we said last week, Jesus wasn't just another good teacher, another guru among gurus teaching a better way to live, although he did teach us how to live. Ghandi, Muhammed, Buddha & all others, were men. Jesus was the God-Man, full of power, the only one who conquers death. The only one who could make that perfect sacrifice. And, when that happened his power was released to us who would believe by way of his Spirit. Thomas says, *"I won't believe it until I can see the nail holes in his hands & stick my finger in his side"* - And we have this great painting by Carravagio of that, and Jesus patiently guides our hands through all the doubts & fears of knowing him. Here Thomas, let me have your hand... and he believes. And Jesus says, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen & yet have believed."*⁶

Saving faith says, *"Christ lives in me in power!"* It became personal to the disciples - and later Jesus breathes out the Holy Spirit on them (v22). They weren't practicing religion, they were following Jesus, experiencing his resurrection power. Jesus taught them the heart of God, and through his death & resurrection gave them the power to live it - they believe, and receive the Holy Spirit, and their relationship with him is now infused with power - and he does so also for us, if we would believe & receive him.

A young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate a car. He & his father had spent months looking at cars, and the week before graduation, they found the perfect car. On the eve of his graduation, his father handed him a gift wrapped Bible. No car keys, a Bible. Bill was so angry, he threw the Bible down & stormed out of the house. He & his father never saw each other again. It was the news of his father's death that brought Bill home again. As he sat one night going

⁶ *The Holy Bible : English st &ard version*. 2001 (Jn 20:29). Wheaton: St &ard Bible Society.

through his father's possessions that he was to inherit, he came across the Bible his father had given him. He opened it to find a cashier's check, dated the day of his graduation - in the exact amount of the car they'd chosen together. How many people in this world have done the same thing to Jesus. Literally tossed aside a wonderful promise, because they didn't understand it, didn't believe it, and denied its power?

Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God with power; the disciples experienced it & were empowered to live it. When we're looking for answers to life **maybe we should** remember the question, "Whom are we seeking?" We usually seek the 'what'; money, sex, relationships, prestige, position. The world is full of empty promises, but Mary walked upon an empty tomb full of promise. An empty tomb full of power to become God's own & live the kingdom. Whom are you seeking?