

April 8, 2012 – Easter
“Seeing Is Believing”
John 20:1-18

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. **2** She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. **4** They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. **6** Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, **7** while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. **8** Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— **9** for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. **10** Then they went home.

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. **12** She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. **13** "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. **15** "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

16 "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

18 Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

Is there something you've ever seen that you wouldn't have believed if someone had simply told you about it?

A pastor was contacted by the parents of a teenage girl who was in a catatonic state (immobile, wouldn't speak, was not taking care of herself, would just sit with her head down and stare without responding). The pastor met with the parents to get the full account of the situation. Then the pastor and his assistant visited the teenager. They told her that not only was she handling her problems in the wrong way, but things could get worse if she continued in the state she was in. Then they shared that there was a God who loved her and there was hope in Jesus Christ. Soon she started to respond. She believed what they were telling her and she accepted Christ, His help and hope. Soon they were able to convince her to leave not only her room but to go outside her house. They took her to a hair salon. She sat in the chair with her head down and her hair in front of her face. She was given a haircut, and a style that allowed her sweet face to be seen. In time she began to smile again, come out of her shell, and even get a job. She was a new person and began to minister to others. She married, had two children and is living a normal life today. Now, I might be skeptical about a story like that, except that I knew that girl, I saw her before and after she gave her life to Christ. I owned a salon at the time and I was the one who cut her hair. Seeing is believing.

Much has happened the past three days of Jesus' life. If you were one of Jesus' disciples, you would have went from celebrating a Passover meal with him (the Last Supper) to watching him be arrested, killed, and buried. Can you imagine how they must have felt? Confused, disappointed, uncertainty; Why, just a week earlier Jesus entered Jerusalem, and people were hailing Him as their King. The disciples must have been ecstatic. They thought, "Yes, Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, now everyone knows it, He is the one who is going to liberate us from Roman Rule, and become king of Israel." But it all seemed to go downhill from there. How could He be dead, how could we have been so wrong, how could this have happened? What unbearable grief they must have been experiencing, for they had spent three years with Jesus and had come to know and love Him, you know what it is like to lose someone you're close too, they were brokenhearted, they felt despair and hopelessness. They also must have been experiencing tremendous fear and desperation. If their leader had been executed what would the authorities do to His followers?

In John's account of the Resurrection of Jesus we find three people at the empty tomb; Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, believed to be John who wrote this gospel. John means, "God is gracious / merciful" and John instead of using

his name would refer to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He was an eyewitness to these events and wrote about them in this gospel. Each one, Peter, John and Mary could say, "Seeing is believing!"

Mary Mag-da-le-ne – (Greek) Maria Mag-dal-ay-nay`

Apparently Mary was given this name because she was from Magdala, a village on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, and to distinguish her from the other women named Mary who were also disciples of Jesus. Mary was a popular name being a form of the name Miriam, who was the sister of Moses. Mary Magdalene was among those who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and His Disciples. Jesus had cast a legion of (7) demons out of Mary (Luke 8:2-3). He had freed her from years of, torture, diseases, mental disorders, and being an outcast in society due to her demon possession. So you can imagine how grateful she was to Jesus.

She stood at a distance with others (Luke 23:49) during the closing hours of Christ's agony on the cross and must have collapsed in grief as she watched by the cross till Jesus' death, then she waited till the body was taken down and wrapped in the linen cloth and placed in the tomb. She followed and saw where the body of Jesus was placed, as she sat across from the tomb and watched.

Then she and the other women went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint His body (Luke 23:56). But by the time they were finished it was sun-down and the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law. They would have to wait until Sunday to anoint the body. They went as early as they could on Sunday morning, while it was still dark.

When they arrived they found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb, and Mary ran to where Peter and John were staying. She told them, "It's wasn't bad enough that our religious leaders and enemies killed our Master now they have desecrated His body by taken it from the tomb before we could properly embalm it, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Peter, John, and Mary went back to the tomb. Peter and John started out together running, but the younger John arrived first. John only looked in, but did not enter the tomb. Of course, impetuous Peter arrived and went right inside the empty tomb without hesitation.

The graveclothes were left as if Jesus had passed right through them. The cloth that would have been around the head was folded or rolled up and placed separately. If the body had been stolen there would be no way that the grave robbers would have left the linens behind. They would not risk being caught by taking the time to unwrap the body in the tomb. The neatness and order indicated that there was no hasty removal of Jesus' body. Rather, Jesus arose and left the graveclothes lying there, empty. (v8-9) When John went in the tomb "he saw and believed." Peter only saw, but John saw and believed. Even though they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead, John saw the empty tomb and graveclothes and believed even though he did not yet

understand the scriptural prophecies. Seeing is believing, but, like John, blessed are future generations who will believe without physically seeing the Risen Christ.

Having seen the empty tomb for themselves, John and Peter, then went back home. But Mary stayed outside the tomb and wept. Then she stooped and looked in and saw two angels who asked her why she was crying. Her answer was (v13b), "Because they have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have put him."

Then she turned to leave. There are two angels in the tomb who speak to her and she turns to leave. She was so grief-stricken she could only think of the missing body. I don't know if she even realized they were angels. She was not even thinking about that she was beside herself in brokenhearted despair.

Then she saw someone standing outside the tomb, it was Jesus but she didn't recognize Him; Perhaps because her eyes were so swollen from weeping for the last 3 days, although after His resurrection there was something different about Jesus' appearance, which made it difficult for Him to be recognized immediately. She naturally assumed it was the gardener. Jesus asks her the same question asked by the angels, "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

"Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him." Again, because of her grief she is not thinking clearly, what would she do if she could find the body, how would she lift it by herself to bring it back to the tomb? All she cares about is finding the body. Well, her question is about to be answered by the very one she is looking for. Because ...

It is then that Jesus says her name, and it must have sounded like a symphony, "Mary!" She heard her name in the unmistakable way that only He would say it and she recognized His voice. She turned and cried out, "Teacher", "Master", "Lord!" The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and calls them by name, and they recognize His voice.

Have you ever seen *Westside Story*? It was on a few weeks ago, did you see it? Do you know the story? Tony falls in love with Maria and sings "Maria, the most beautiful sound I've ever heard, say it loud and there's music playing, say it soft and it's almost like praying, Maria." At the end of the story, someone is looking for Tony to shoot him, so Tony is in hiding. Then he's told that Maria has been murdered. Now, Tony doesn't care about his own life, he comes out of hiding even though it isn't safe. Suddenly, he hears his name called and looks and sees that Maria, who he thought was dead is alive and he goes from unspeakable grief to unspeakable joy as he runs to cling to her. As you could imagine you would do if you saw someone you love and told was dead, but was actually alive.

Mary went to cling to Jesus. She did not want to lose Him again. But Jesus was not going to stay on earth in His pre-resurrected state. He had a new glorious resurrected body ...hmm, maybe that had something to do with not being recognized so easily.

Mary had not yet understood the Resurrection. Jesus would not remain on this earth in physical form, but would ascend to heaven, so that the Holy Spirit could come.

(v17) Jesus instructed Mary to take this message to His brothers. They are no longer simply His disciples. For the first time, Jesus identifies God as **their** Father. Thus, the declaration of John 1:12, that those who believed in Jesus would receive authority / power to become children of God, would be fulfilled for the disciples for the very first time. This was the new set of circumstances that Mary and the others were to embrace and welcome.

(v18) Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Mary was the first person to see the risen Christ, and seeing is believing. She was changed just by hearing Him say her name.

What about Simon Peter? No further word is given us by John's gospel as to how he knew. The disciples "returned to their homes." John returned believing. But what about Simon? We have a clue in Luke's gospel. Late in the day, when the two who had encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus reached the room where the disciples had gathered, the word was out: "The Lord is risen, and has appeared to Simon." No word about how it happened. No account to where it happened or as to what was said. But what we know is that whatever occurred in that encounter changed the world. Simon Peter knew!

Confusion, disappointment, uncertainty, grief, despair, hopelessness, fear, desperation Listen, He's calling your name. He wants to have an encounter with you. Sometimes you have no explanation as to how you know, you just know. He did it for you, He wants you to know Him. One word can change everything. "Lord." When Mary heard Him call her she needed no explanation she just addresses Him with that title of intimate respect and adoration. When your life has been rearranged by the way a voice calls your name, you just know! Oh, the wonder of Easter when you know!