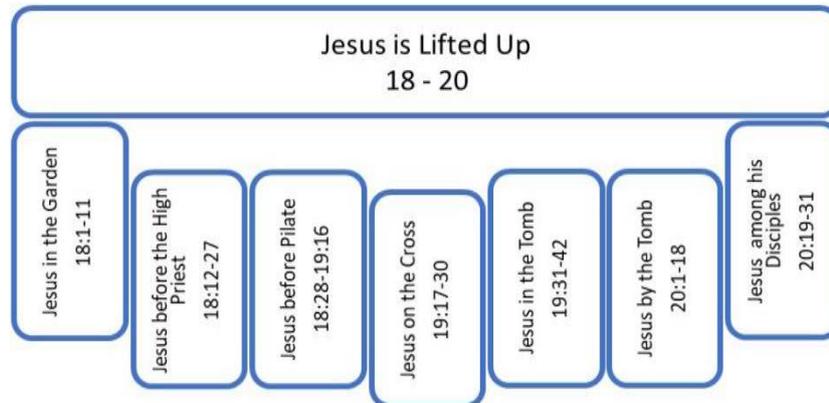


Lesson 35: John 20 The Empty Tomb and Risen Lord

Introduction



He is risen! He is risen indeed! This is one of our exuberant Easter proclamations. He is risen indeed! We have come to the end of John's Gospel. We have just this conclusion in chapter 20 and then an epilogue in chapter 21. This conclusion is John's report of the resurrection of Jesus. Reading through the chapter again, I am left a bit surprised at its brevity, especially on the details about the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is incredibly essential to our faith. Not only is there no exuberant proclamation or embellished, worship language here, but the reverse seems to be true. Concerning just the resurrection the language is very simple and straightforward. Jesus was dead and buried. The tomb is empty. He is now alive. It is as though the text is saying, "These are the facts, just the facts."

That does not mean there is no excitement or tension here. The energy in this text is not in the description of the resurrection but in the response of the witnesses to the news, or the reality of the resurrection. John tells us about Mary Magdalene finding the tomb empty and weeping at the tomb. He tells us about himself and Peter running to the tomb. He tells us about the disciples huddled in fear. And he tells us about Thomas refusing to believe without touching the wounds. There is some struggle here to come to terms with the reality of an empty tomb.

And by focusing on the responses of these individual believers, John uses the occasion of the resurrection to challenge us, the readers, in our own response to the reality of the empty tomb. It's as though he is asking, "What about you? How do you assess the reality of the empty tomb? The report of the resurrection? Faced with this witness regarding Jesus Christ, you must make a choice. Do you believe? Do you need to continue to seek? Do you turn away?"

Let's take these four short accounts one by one. We start with the response of Peter and John in chapter 20, verses 1-10.

Peter and John (20:1-10)

¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." ³ So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; ⁵ and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*; but he did not go in. ⁶ And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*, ⁷ and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰ So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

The scene starts with Mary Magdalene coming early to the tomb on the first day of the week. The other Gospels also tell us that the tomb was found empty on the first day. Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus on the day of preparation of the Sabbath, so that would have been a Friday, Sabbath is of course Saturday, the last day of the Jewish week, and then Mary then is coming on first day, which is our Sunday. When we speak of Jesus being in the grave three days, we are using the Jewish system of inclusive counting. This is how they would count it. Each part of a day counts as a day. So, part of Friday, the day he was crucified and then buried; all of Saturday; and then part of Sunday. He, apparently, rose early on Sunday morning. So that's three days in inclusive counting. All the Gospels agree with this witness. And this is why we worship as Christians on Sunday. The Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic covenant. We do not worship on the Sabbath. We worship on the day of our risen Lord, on Sunday.

The three Gospels agree that it is Sunday, but they all give a different report on who shows up to care for the body of Jesus. John just mentions 1 woman. Matthew mentions 2 women, Mark mentions 3 women, and Luke, while naming 3 women indicates there were other women also. Luke's report helps us make sense of the different women present. There is not a disagreement among the Gospels. There is simply a limiting of the detail by each writer. So according to Luke we know there were actually quite a number of women present. A group of women came to the tomb with spices for the body of Jesus. And each author chooses which of these women name according to the purpose of his witness. None of the writers felt it was necessary to name every woman present. And that is typical of narrative throughout the Bible in which the names and details of individuals are given sparsely and in accordance with the point that is being made.

John's narrative of the resurrection is very short. And he carefully chooses the detail he relates to make specific points. He has a point to make that relates specifically to Mary Magdalene. So, he only mentions her. Similarly, he only mentions the responses of Peter and John running to the tomb, though there very well may have been other people present when Mary came to Peter and John. So we will come back to Mary in a minute.

Hearing Mary's report of an empty tomb, Peter and John take off running. So, let's focus in this first story on them. I love how John, still not using his own name, reports that he outran Peter to the tomb. It just sounds like something a guy would point out, that he got there first. Though I think the real reason is not to brag about being faster, but to emphasize the different ways that each disciple processes the report of Mary and the scene of the empty tomb.

John arrives first, but he pauses at the entrance to the tomb. He sees the grave clothes laying in there, on the ground, but he is more hesitant, more reflective, perhaps more unsure. Early in our marriage Brenda and I were on our way to a conference in Georgia. I was driving. The car in front of us drifted to the left into the passing lane and then swerved sharply to the right, off the highway, down a grassy slope, crashing into a tree. I pulled over onto the grass, coming to a stop past the wrecked car and my mind was racing. I just sat there, thinking, "What if the driver is dead? What if they are seriously injured? What do I do? Who should I call?" And I sat motionless for several seconds before my mind finally said, "Just go see." When I got out and turned to the other car, I remember the surprise of seeing Brenda already there at the driver's door of the other car. I had not even noticed her get out of our car. It is a fitting difference in our temperaments. I am not the guy you want for immediate split-second action in a crisis. My mind is going to stop me and I'm going to be thinking. Brenda jumps into action.

This helps me understand John and Peter at the tomb. John stops at the entry way to think about what he might find. He's hesitant to go in. Peter flies right by. He never even slows down. That is the more action oriented, impulsive Peter that we have come to know from the Gospel account. As a result, Peter was the first to see really the full empty tomb and the linen wrappings there, and especially the face cloth rolled up and placed to the side. If someone had come and taken the body, they would not take off the linen wrappings. Why would they do that? That makes no sense. And

why would they wrap up the face cloth nicely and place it there, on the side with care? What has happened here in this scene?

Well, when John enters, and he has thought, he has reflected, he has looked, we are told that he sees and he believes. That's a key sentence here, that's in verse 8. He saw and believed. "What did John believe?" Verse 9 tells us. "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." Looking into the empty tomb, John does not agree with Mary that somebody came and took the body. John sees the empty tomb, the cast-off linen, the rolled-up face cloth, and he believes that Jesus has risen from the dead.

That is what he believes. What does the fact that he has just now believed this tell us his faith? Is this his saving faith moment, standing here at the tomb? John sees and believes. Had John not truly believed before this moment? We do know that it is possible to follow Jesus, believing something about Jesus or what you want Jesus to be without truly believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord. That has happened often in this Gospel. Is John just now experiencing that spiritual sight of true faith by which a person is forgiven for their sins?

No. That does not fit, actually, what we have already been told, especially in the previous section of the Gospel as Jesus was preparing his disciples for what was to come. That section is chapter 13-17. Jesus told the disciples in chapter 13 that they were clean, all of them except for the one who would betray him. That was in the context of washing their feet. He tells them again that they are clean in chapter 15 in the context of the vine and the branches. And then in chapter 17, he declares that they have known, they have believed, they have received. Jesus is almost emphatic about it. They have already believed. John's faith has been affirmed by Jesus. So, this believing and seeing at the tomb is not his moment of saving faith. He has already believed in Jesus.

This is the belief of a believer who has just come to see clearly a truth that he did not understand before. It can be surprising to us that such a basic truth as the resurrection would be something a true believer would not yet have realized or understood. But that is because we live on the other side of the cross. Even with the indication from Jesus about his death and about his resurrection, the disciples were in a time of major transition, of theological transition and personal transition. We're moving Old Covenant to New Covenant, to having Jesus with us, to not having Jesus with us and they just haven't gotten it. And even though the resurrection was indicated by the God, it had not sunk in to them what's really going to happen. And Jesus did not push it. He gave indication, but essentially, he trusted that the reality of his resurrection would make things clear pretty soon enough. And that's what happens to John, that he sees and he believes.

And here is a principle of faith for us. Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to further belief as we grow in our understand of his Word. We are constantly challenged or faced with new understanding or realities to believe in. We are born again in a moment when the eyes of our heart first truly see Jesus. We are now saved. We're new. We are in his Kingdom. But after this moment of belief, we continue to be challenged by the truth of God as we learn and grow. We continue to have opportunities to believe.

All right. Moving from Peter and John in this first scene, we now return to the account of Mary. This is in verses 11-18.

Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)

¹¹ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you 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!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that* He had said these things to her.

Mary's response contrasts John's response. John saw the empty tomb and believed. Mary, also a believer in Jesus, has not yet understood what has happened. She knows something is terribly wrong. The hatred against Jesus that led to the cross has motivated evil men to come and desecrate his body. That is her fear. She loves Jesus. She came this morning to honor him in his death. But his body is gone.

I wonder if John kept his realization to himself. He believed, but in the shock of the moment, being a reflective soul, he turned home, mind churning, not ready into put to words what was rolling about in his mind and in his heart; what he saw as true. For whatever reason, he does not seem to have spoken to Mary. She is left by the tomb in grief, weeping. And she looks into the tomb and she sees two angels. John gives us little of that encounter, just enough to emphasize that Mary remains focused on this fear. She says, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not now where they have laid him." She sees angels, but that's her focus. She's very fixed.

Unexpectedly, she becomes aware of another presence, a man. He is standing nearby and he speaks to her. And she does not recognize him as Jesus. We are not told whether this is because his face just isn't clearly visible. You know, he's standing outside the tomb. It's believable, especially considering Mary's emotional state and her assumption about Jesus. He is dead. She is looking for a body. She is not looking for a living man. Another explanation could be that Jesus actually veils himself in his risen form, so that she does not recognize him until he is ready. But whichever, she doesn't get that it's Jesus.

And then Jesus asks a question and that question communicates on more than one level. He says, "Whom are you seeking?" Whom are you seeking? And she just takes it to mean the body of Jesus, but this is the question of the Gospel, right? Whom are you seeking? Are you seeking the Jesus that you want to define yourself, the Messiah you want, or the prophet, or the king you want; or are you seeking Jesus as he truly is? Whom are you really seeking? It is the question that Jesus asked in chapter 1 when the two disciples from John the Baptist started following him and he turns around and asks them, "What are you seeking?" Or those who came to arrest him in the garden in chapter 18, and he asked them, "Who do you seek?" It's John's question for the readers of his Gospel, "Whom do you seek?"

Still not understanding, Mary asks for the man's help in finding the body of Jesus, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Then Jesus opens her eyes to see by speaking her name, "Mary!" He is the good shepherd. He knows his sheep by name. And his sheep recognize his voice. She responds, "Rabboni (teacher)," and she clings to him.

Jesus has a task for Mary to do. He sends her to the disciples as the first witness of his resurrection. That is significant. In the Greek and Roman world of Jesus, the witness of a woman was not counted as valid if not supported by the witness of a man. Jesus rejects that idea as does John. The strongest witnesses in the Gospel along with the testimonies of John the Baptist and Peter are women. In chapter 4, we get the witness of the Samaritan woman who recognizes Jesus as Christ and shares the news with her village. We get the clearest statement that Jesus is the Christ from Martha in chapter 11. And then in chapter 12 Martha's sister Mary performs an extravagant act of worship, anointing the feet of Jesus. And now here we have Jesus entrusting his first appearance not to Peter, not to John who had just left this very spot. They were just there. But instead, Jesus waits for them to leave and then reveals himself to Mary. And he entrusts to Mary this incredible role to be the first witness of the resurrection, to go and tell the brethren. And Mary obeys. She goes and announces to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

Jesus' specific words to Mary provide us with another principle of faith. He said this,

“Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’ ”

We have listened to Jesus continually hold in tension two realities, that he is equal to God and distinct from the Father. We're going to see both in this chapter. Here with Mary he is emphasizing a distinction. And so, we have this principle. Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to relationship with God the Father.

Jesus does not replace relationship with the Father. Jesus establishes our relationship with the Father. And he points us to that relationship. You remember, in other Gospels he teaches us to pray, “Our Father who is in heaven, holy be your name. Your will be done on earth as in heaven.” Jesus does say pray in his name, but he teaches us to pray to the Father. So we see him distinguishing, making a distinction between himself and the Father, and then directing us to the Father.

After this scene with Mary, next we find Jesus revealing himself to his disciples as a group. This is in verses 19-23.

The Disciples (20:19-23)

¹⁹ So when it was evening on that day, the first *day* of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace *be* with you.” ²⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, “Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ “If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained.”

Jesus' appears miraculously in the midst of his disciples. It's still the first day. This is still Sunday. And you can imagine the shock. They haven't even had the time to process the words of Peter and John and of Mary. They're still huddled, they're in fear, and his first words are, “Peace be with you.” It is easy to take this as a common, religious greeting and just move on with the story. But I do not think so. I think we need to pause. I think by saying, “Peace be with you,” Jesus is bringing to mind the whole conversation he had with them, chapters 13-17, the night of his arrest. He had forewarned them of coming trouble, and he had promised peace. He said it would be like the labor pains of a woman giving birth; intense trial followed by joy.

And that's what they experienced. They experienced the intensity. And then they are gathered here in fear, basically waiting for a knock on the door that's going to signal their own arrest and execution. They're afraid the Jews will come for them. And then Jesus appears, and he says, “Peace be with you,” and they rejoice. The trial is over. The time for joy is come.

And he had proclaimed before to them peace twice. “Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful (John 14:27).” He also said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).”

How did the disciples do, applying that teaching they had just received from Jesus? You know, receive my peace. “Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful...take courage.” Yet, it's like they immediately forgot everything. They forgot the sermon immediately. They heard the sermon and then, immediately, the tribulation happens and then all the teaching just goes out of their mind. And they don't have peace. Jesus promised them peace. They don't have peace. They have fear. He promised courage, they have fear. And this is often the way of Christian growth. The initial teaching finds reception in our heads. You know, we're all nodding as the preacher is preaching. This is great stuff! We “amen” it. It's great! It's awesome! But when circumstances of fear or stress or temptation overcome us, we completely forget the lesson and we act instead out of our human flesh. It's our

fear response. It's our stress response. It is not unusual to fail more than once before that truth we believe in intellectually finally takes hold strongly enough in our heart and our character to guide us successfully through times of trouble. And Jesus knew this was going to be the case. He knew, when he was giving them this teaching that they weren't going to be able to live by it over these next three days. But he is setting the stage. You know, they have got to fail before they can succeed.

The disciples lacked experience. Two other things they lacked. They lacked conviction that Jesus had indeed overcome the world. They just hadn't seen it yet. But Jesus is here giving them that conviction. This is going to be a different group of men now that they've seen Jesus. He has gone to the cross and he has come back. Death could not hold him down. He has overcome. He provides them with powerful assurance, showing them the actual wounds in his hands and in his side. Jesus strengthens them with the conviction of his victory over death. He has won.

That's not all they lack. At this moment they also lack the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them he would not leave them alone but would send the Helper. The Holy Spirit would work in them and would work as a witness to the world to empower their witness. And the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. So, there's no wonder they haven't yet received that peace that surpasses understanding. They haven't yet received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That is a reality that they are lacking in their current situation. The Spirit has not yet been sent. Jesus reminds them of this promise by breathing on them and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." And that breathing is a powerful image. In Genesis chapter 2 God breathes into Adam and he becomes man. It is by the Spirit of God that we truly become alive, we truly become who we are created to be as human beings. And here, by breathing on them it's as though Jesus is saying he's restoring humanity. This is the beginning of the restoration into that image that we were created to be. Something new is beginning, a new creation as he breathes on them. We should not misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. This is a foreshadowing. They are not at this moment receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus is reminding them of what is soon to come. The Book of Acts makes clear that Spirit comes on the disciples at the Feast of Pentecost, and Pentecost is fifty days later, fifty days after Passover.

The Spirit will empower the disciples as the new creation, the new body for their ministry of witness. Jesus reminds them here of their calling, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent me, I also send you." The disciples need to calm down and face their fears. They need to receive the peace of the Holy Spirit because they have a mission to accomplish. They are to be his witnesses in the world.

And let's think a little bit about the words Jesus uses here in describing that mission. He uses words that sometimes cause confusion. He says, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." Some traditions have taken this promise to mean that the leaders of the church, that high-up authorities have this special right or responsibility to dispense forgiveness, that they can actually, through ritual or just through the rite of their office, say who is forgiven and who is not forgiven. And Jesus said something similar with slightly different language in Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

The keys of heaven imply stewardship, and this sounds like they are opening the doors of Heaven, or they are shutting the doors of Heaven. These men are to be stewards on behalf of Jesus their king. On what basis, how is it that they open and shut the door of heaven or that they give or hold back forgiveness? John does not explain it specifically here.

We still have good grounds for interpretation. First, we recognize that Jesus is giving these words in the context of commissioning the disciples as sent ones. You're going to be sent ones, and those you forgive are forgiven and those you don't forgive are not forgiven. All the gospels include language of a great commission, Matthew 28:18-20 is the longest. So, our next step of interpretation, we have noticed this context, these words were given in the context of commission, so we go look at all of these passages in the different Gospels to clarify, to find out more about that mission. What is Jesus

sending the disciples to do? He is sending them to “go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all I have taught you.” That’s the Great Commission.

And after we compare those passages in the Gospels, we can then look through the Book of Acts and the Epistles to observe how the disciples actually carry out this commission. They are to go and make disciples. They are to proclaim forgiveness. How to they do that? Did they set up a priesthood with ecclesiastical institutions with the authority to forgive or to deny forgiveness? No. Does it come through ritual? They set up all these rituals people have to follow. No! That is actually what you really don’t see in the Book of Acts or in the Epistles. It is quite absent from the spread of the Gospel in the first century.

What they did was proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is throughout John’s Gospel. How does somebody gain eternal life? John 3:16, it’s by believing in Jesus. That’s how you gain eternal life. It is repeated throughout by John. They affirm forgiveness to all who believe and receive Jesus. It’s not some ecclesiastical power or authority. It’s not some ritual that people have to go through. They proclaim a message and when people believe in Jesus, according to the Gospel, the apostles proclaim over them forgiveness. And for those who refuse, who reject Jesus, the apostles proclaim what is true: that everybody who denies the Son is already judged. So, it’s not in their power to give or take forgiveness; it’s in their power to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s the trust he has given them. And when they proclaim that, people have a choice to receive it or to reject it, and then that’s how they establish who is forgiven and who is not forgiven.

Taking this whole story, here is another principle of faith for you. Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to live as a witness of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s what I see Jesus saying here. He’s breathing on them, receive the Holy Spirit, peace be with you, may the power of the Spirit be working in you. And now go as sent ones. So belief in Jesus Christ calls us to live as a witness to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Living in the will of God, dependent on Jesus Christ is the source of our peace. And then the spiritual and emotional well-being, this peace “shalom” that we experience through dependent relationship on Jesus, that enables us for service in the world. We are not seeking peace for ourselves to have a comfortable life. We are seeking the spiritual and emotional strength and well-being to make a difference.

The final scene of the chapter is a famous one. It is the story of doubting Thomas. This is verses 24-29.

Thomas (20:24-29)

²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” ²⁶ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace *be* with you.” ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.”

We are familiar with doubting Thomas, so we probably need to actually redeem here our traditional view. He gets associated with this adjective of “doubting” by refusing to believe the disciples’ report and wanting to see and touch the wounds of Jesus. Let’s remember that in chapter 11, when all the disciples were dismayed by Jesus’ declaration they were going back into Judea, where people wanted to kill them, it was Thomas who spoke up and said, “Let’s go and die with him.” So, he may be doubting Thomas, but he also seems to be courageous Thomas. He is not one-dimensional.

We also need to remember the scene we just left. Who just refused to believe in the witness that Jesus had risen from the dead? I mean, Mary had come and told them that Jesus raised from the

dead, but they were all staying hidden in the room and stayed hidden in the room in fear of the Jews. And to whom did Jesus already offer the visible proof of his wounds? It seems to me the disciples don't fare much better in the telling of the story than Thomas. He just was not there when it happened.

This scene with Thomas does provide an opportunity for John to emphasize two more points about faith. First, belief in Jesus Christ calls us to believe that Jesus is God. These are the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God." Just like when the blind man fell at his feet to worship him, and just as he has taught of himself, Jesus receives this declaration that he is God. This is Jesus' own teaching. To Mary Jesus indicates his distinctiveness from the Father. You know, "I am going to my Father and your Father." By Thomas we are reminded of Jesus' equality with the Father. Belief in Jesus is both a call to relationship with the Father and a call to recognize the Son as God. Both ideas together are part of this mystery we call the Trinity. Father, Son and Spirit are all distinct and are all equal, rightly recognized as one God. We began this Gospel with that mystery. The Word was with God. The Word was God. Two truths in tension that speak to the mystery of the Trinity, of the nature of God.

We are given another principle here. Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to believe in a spiritual reality that we have not confirmed with our physical sight. All the disciples had this benefit that their physical sight confirmed their spiritual sight. All the disciples had this benefit that their physical sight confirmed their spiritual sight. They actually saw Jesus risen from the dead. And we do not have the same benefit. In fact, Jesus speaks of the vast majority of all believers here, including us, when he says, "Blessed *are* they who do not see, and *yet* believe." And John knew that this was the message that was going forward. This is what most are going to have to do: to believe without seeing.

In this chapter, in John 20, by focusing on the interaction of these different believers as they are confronted by the empty tomb and as they are confronted by the risen Christ, John has emphasized the two great themes of his Gospel: the nature of Jesus and the nature of faith. We can take away several principles from these interactions. I have mentioned to you five that stand out to me. Let me repeat them.

Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to further belief as we grow in our understand of his Word.

Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to relationship with God the Father.

Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to live in the world as a witness of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Belief in Jesus Christ calls us to believe that Jesus is God.

And belief in Jesus Christ calls us to believe in a spiritual reality that we have not confirmed with our own physical sight.

These are aspect of the belief that we are being called to. In this last chapter we have been confronted with an empty tomb and a risen Savior. Entering into the story ourselves we are challenged along with Mary to consider the question from Jesus, "Whom do you seek?" Are you seeking to know God the Father through God the Son? Are you seeking the Jesus who is, the God who is? Are you willing to believe even though you have not seen?

John is very clear on his purpose for writing this Gospel. Let's end with this purpose statement, the last two verses of the chapter, John 20:30-31.

John's purpose (20:30-31)

³⁰ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

What did John write about? The signs Jesus performed in the presence of the disciples.

Why did he write about these? That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And why does he want you to believe this about Jesus? That believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 20:1-10. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing particularly in regard to Peter and John?
2. Read John 20:11-18. What stands out to you in regard to Mary?
3. Read John 20:19-29. What stands out to you in regard to the disciples and Thomas?
4. Does Jesus' declaration "Peace be with you" communicate more than just a simple greeting? What state are the disciples in when Jesus arrives? What promises had Jesus made about peace in chapters 14 and 16?
5. Jesus connects sending, the Holy Spirit and the right to forgive in his commission of the disciples. How are these three realities connected in other commission passages, such as Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:7-8?
6. Considering the story of Acts and the Epistles, how do the disciples practically carry-out Jesus words that who they forgive is forgiven and who they do not forgive is not forgiven? Do they do this according to their ecclesiastical authority as church leaders? If not, how do you see the communication of forgiveness carried-out?
7. Compare the appearance to Thomas with the appearance to the disciples. What was the state of the disciples' faith before Jesus appeared? What did Jesus say or do? How about Thomas?
8. Considering all the people in this chapter, who believes without seeing the risen Lord? (Notice the repetition of the word "see".)
9. Read John 20:30-31. Who is John writing this for? What is John's purpose for his Gospel?