**THE LIVING PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION**

John 20:11-29

To set the stage for today’s lesson – we’ll continue looking at John’s account of the resurrection – I would like us to do something a little different. We’re going to break up into groups of 2-3 and discuss one question. Last week we looked at the first 10 verses of John Ch 20 and considered the evidence that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. There’s the physical evidence. There’s the testimony given by various people. We even heard the testimony of an angel. Apparently, however, there are no eye witnesses to the actual event of the resurrection. Each group will be a team of investigators looking into this rather bizarre occurrence. **[show slide]** I am calling it “The case of the missing Jesus.” We know that His body was placed in the tomb late Friday afternoon and the tomb was sealed, but now it’s not there. I want your group to discuss the various evidence that we have up to and including chronologically verse 10 of Ch 20. Don’t go any further. Based on the evidence up to this point, what is your conclusion? Put yourself in their position. What do you think has happened to the body of Jesus? Take about five minutes and then we’ll hear from each group. **[discuss, get feedback]**

Three possible conclusions: (1) someone took it; (2) there was a resurrection from the dead; or (3) not sure yet what happened.

OK, so now let’s pick up the action in v 11…

READ John 20:11-18 [Mary here is Mary Magdalene]

Here for the first time someone actually sees the resurrected Lord. This is His first recorded post-resurrection appearance. And it’s interesting that the person He chooses to show Himself to first is Mary Magdalene. We don’t really know that much about Mary other than (1) she’s from the town of Magdala which is on the Sea of Galilee; (2) she had once been demon possessed (Luke 8 says she had been delivered of 7 demons, apparently by Jesus); and (3) she is one of Jesus’ followers. When Jesus shows up she’s crying. She’s weeping with unrestrained grief. She’s upset. And she explains why when asked, “why are you weeping?” Twice she is asked – once by the 2 angels and once by Jesus. She is very distraught because she thinks someone has removed Jesus’ body. She doesn’t know who took Him and she doesn’t know where they took Him. She’s in a state of confusion and very sad. Clearly she’s not expecting a resurrection!

When she turns around she sees Jesus but she doesn’t recognize Him right away. She thinks He’s the gardener. So why doesn’t Mary recognize Jesus? Several possible reasons. For one thing it’s still a bit dark outside. The sun hasn’t quite come up yet. She’s been crying so her eyes are blurred from her tears. And then probably Jesus appears somewhat different than she remembered. He’s now in an eternal, resurrected body. All of these might explain why she doesn’t recognize Jesus. However when Jesus says, “Mary” – she immediately recognizes Him. There’s something unique about the way Jesus says her name. She knows that voice and she cries out “Rabboni! This is the Teacher. This is Jesus. By the way this is a great illustration of John 10:4 where Jesus said [speaking of Himself as the Good Shepherd]: “When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.” Mary knows Jesus’ voice.

She’s so happy to see Jesus that she reaches out and hugs Jesus. Now that she’s found Him she doesn’t want to let Him go! Seeing Jesus has transformed Mary from the depths of sorrow to heights of joy. Her reaction is spontaneous. She can’t help herself.

In verse 17 Jesus tells Mary, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father…” In other words, “Mary, I can’t stay. You’re not going to be able to keep Me here. I’m going back to the Father.” That’s the essence of what Jesus tells her. Jesus says, “This is what I want you to do. Go to My brothers and give them this message: ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Now that Jesus has completed His mission of redemption, there’s a relationship change that has taken place – No longer are we just followers or disciples of Jesus. We are that for sure, but we are MORE than that! We’re brothers and sisters in Christ. We’re part of God’s family. We have now entered into the same kind of relationship with God the Father that Jesus has. My Father – your Father, My God – your God! “Mary, go and tell my brothers (those 11 disciples) everything I said to you. Go tell them.”

So with that Mary Magdalene goes off and tells the disciples what Jesus said. John doesn’t record the reaction of the disciples after Mary drops the bombshell, v 18, “I have seen the Lord.” However Luke 24:10, a parallel passage, gives us a hint. They don’t believe her. One version says they think the report of having seen Jesus is nonsense. Nor do they believe the other women when they return also saying they have seen Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke mention Jesus appearing to several women on the road. One is Mary Magdalene but also mentioned are Mary the mother of James and Salome and Joanna. All of these women tell the disciples the same thing – “We have seen Jesus.” But the disciples do not believe them. Not even John believes them. He was the one who back in v 8 went into the empty tomb, saw the linen cloths lying there and believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. I want you to remember this. It’s going to be important later on.

I made a list of all the recorded post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (those that are specifically mentioned in scripture). 1 – Mary Magdalene in the garden [John 20:11-18]; 2 – various women on the road [Matthew 28, Mark 16 and Luke 24]; 3 – Peter [Luke 24 and 1 Cor 15:5]; 4 – the two disciples on the road to Emmaus [Luke 24]; 5 – to 10 of the 11 disciples, which John mentions next. All of Jesus’ first 5 appearances take place the same day, Resurrection Sunday. John mentions 2 of them. I just want you to be aware of the other three.

READ John 20:19-25

So now Jesus appears to His disciples – or at least to 10 of the 11. Notice the state of mind of the disciples. When Jesus shows up they’re in hiding. The doors are locked. They’re afraid –“for fear of the Jews,” v 19. Perhaps they’re afraid that the temple police might come and arrest them and that they might face the same fate that Jesus did. Miraculously Jesus transports Himself the 7 miles from Emmaus to Jerusalem where the disciples are meeting. And He just appears in the room. V 20 says that He came and stood among them. Jesus is in His resurrected body which means He can move about without the limitations of a physical body.

Jesus greets the disciples, v 21, “Peace be with you!” In other words, “Do not fear.” And just to show that He’s not merely a phantom or a spirit John says that Jesus shows the disciples His hands and His side. They bear marks, scars from His crucifixion. The disciples can actually reach out and touch Jesus. So there are definite similarities in the way Jesus’ resurrected body looks now as compared to the way His physical body looked before. They’re similar, but somewhat different. Luke 24 in the account of Jesus appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus says, “He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them.” Luke 24:41-43) So Jesus is not merely in a spirit form. Ghosts don’t eat. He is in a resurrected body which is similar in appearance to His physical body, but it is different – it is made of a different substance – one that can last forever and won’t wear out.

The disciples are glad to see Jesus, v 20. This is an understatement. You can just imagine how excited they must have been to see Jesus. Jesus has an important message for them – a mini sermon of sorts. I like to refer to it as the Preamble to the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you…” That will come later just prior to Jesus ascending back to heaven. For now Jesus tells His disciples, v 21: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The reason Jesus came was to seek and to save those who were lost – to offer the gift of salvation freely to all. That will now be the disciples’ mission. They will be responsible to proclaim the good news, to preach the gospel, God’s message of salvation to all who will listen. Jesus says, “I am sending you to do that.” So the ministry Jesus began is now going to be continued by His followers. Then v 22 says that Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Of course we know that the Holy Spirit actually comes later at Pentecost. Jesus Himself had told His disciples back in John Ch 16 that He must first go away, back to heaven, before the Helper, the Holy Spirit will come to them. Here Jesus is letting the disciples know that they WILL be empowered for their mission of preaching the gospel by the Holy Spirit.

It’s interesting that when Jesus began His earthly ministry there was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit at His baptism (form of a dove that came to “rest on Him”). When the ministry of the early church is launched there is yet another manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Acts Ch 2 (tongues of fire that “rested on each one of them”).

V 23 has been misinterpreted by some denominations. Who is it that can forgive sins? Only God can do that, right? In Acts 10:43 Peter says, “Everyone who believes in Him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins thru His name.” In Acts 13:38 Paul says, “Thru this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” What Jesus is telling His disciples and us is that our proclaiming of the gospel, the message of salvation, leads to repentance and to the forgiveness of sins. Our gospel is the message of grace and forgiveness. We can share it with others on God’s authority from scripture. Our proclaiming the gospel when believed by faith results in the forgiveness of sins. When rejected, when not believed, forgiveness of sins is withheld. I believe this is the essence of what Jesus is saying – keeping it in context with our great commission.

But unfortunately Thomas wasn’t there for this sermon. He wasn’t present when Jesus appeared to the disciples that Sunday night. And in verse 25 Thomas indicates his unbelief when the other disciples tell him that they saw Jesus. OK so maybe Thomas is a bit more demonstrative about his unbelief than the disciples had been when the women told them they had seen Jesus. But it was nonetheless unbelief, same as Thomas. The disciples didn’t then and Thomas doesn’t now believe that anyone has actually seen a resurrected Jesus. The bottom line here – none of the 11 disciples believed until they saw Jesus. So don’t single Thomas out as the only doubting one. At one time every one of the 11 disciples were doubters. Well, 8 days later Jesus is back…

READ John 20:26-29

Eight days after His last appearance Jesus appears again to His disciples. This time Thomas is present. Notice that they are all still hiding. Their doors are still locked. They are still maintaining a low profile for fear of the Jews. All of sudden, v 26, Jesus appears and He stands among them. He gives them the same greeting He gave them the first time, “Peace be with you.” This time Jesus doesn’t preach a message. This time He has a one-on-one conversation with Thomas. He knows what Thomas had told the disciples before back in v 25: “Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.” So in v 27 Jesus tells Thomas, “Go ahead Thomas, put your finger here in the nail marks in My hands; and go ahead and place your hand in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Well, does Thomas do any of that? No. For him seeing Jesus is enough. He’s convinced. And Thomas proclaims his faith in Christ – “My Lord and My God!” One of the great confessions of all time. By the way, when I think of Thomas, this is what I think of. Jesus knows that Thomas now believes but only because he’s actually seen Jesus with his own eyes. He’s not doubting Thomas any more.

It’s at this point that Jesus makes a profound statement, v 29. His words apply directly to us. He says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Have any of us in this room ever actually seen the risen Jesus? Not yet. We will someday. But we haven’t seen Him yet. Still, at some point we believed. I’ve heard your testimonies. How is it that we believed? By faith based on the testimony of God’s word. As Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction [the evidence] of things not seen.” ***[last slide]*** First Peter 1:8-9 says, “Though you have not seen him [Jesus], you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Our faith in Christ who we have not seen resulted in salvation. So what led you to believe? You haven’t actually seen the risen Lord with your physical eyes. It’s called faith.

We have a risen Christ, a risen Christ whom we love and whom we believe, whom we experience in our lives on a regular basis. This Jesus has transformed our lives. We are walking, talking miracles of God, each one of us. Having experienced the new birth we’ve been born again. We are new creatures in Christ. As believers in our risen Lord we have been called to a commission empowered by the Holy Spirit to take a message to a skeptical sometimes even hostile world – a message of repentance and forgiveness. That’s why we’re here. Close by singing “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today.”