

Something More

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John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her. John 20:11-18 (NRSV)

Before I begin to preach, I want to take the opportunity to thank some special folks. We have a great media team who works really hard to livestream all of this and run our contemporary services; our communications team and hospitality team work so hard on Easter to try and make this a great experience. So grateful for all of them and all the volunteers. And thank you, especially to all our musicians who have been here for four services. You guys are awesome and amazing. Thank you, choir. No choir members were harmed in the producing of this. Credo made it down the stairs and back four times without anybody falling. That was amazing. I'm so grateful because it makes such a difference.

I want you to hear this word from 1 Corinthians 13. We usually read this passage at weddings, but I want you to hear it today on Easter. Just one verse. “For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Let’s pray together. *O God, open us up, open our eyes that we might see and our ears that we might hear the resurrection message, that gospel. And then, O God, open our hearts that that message might fall in and root. And then, O God, open our hands that in response we might live, and love, and serve, and give. Amen.*

If you have lived in Texas for a long time – if you haven’t or if you’re very young – you’ll learn about this. There used to be a restaurant called Pancho’s Mexican Buffet. Some of you remember that. There were dozens of them all over, and there are a few still here. The corporate office was closed, and they closed most of the restaurants. But you’d go through the line, and you’d get as much food as you wanted: greasy enchiladas, poor to mediocre Mexican food. But you got as much as you wanted. You’d go back to your table, and you’d eat all of it. Then, when that was done, there was a little flag on a little stand on your table. It was a Mexican flag, and you pulled the flag up the little stand a bit so the wait staff would see it and they’d bring you more greasy enchiladas. More of the same stuff. I think it’s a restaurant that speaks to our American spirit because we tend to think that if what we have doesn’t satisfy us then more of it somehow will. It’s just a remarkable thing.

I’ve been thinking about what to preach about on Easter. How to get the message across. It was maybe a month ago, and it was a beautiful day. I’m blessed to have a gift from my wife on my 60th birthday and it is a 1984 Jeep CJ7 that has now been restored. It’s awesome and beautiful. So, it was a beautiful day, and the top was down, and I was driving my Jeep. I’m thinking, “What am I going to say on Easter?” The wind is in my hair... so here’s the thing. When you’re in that situation, you have to play music really, really loudly. That’s part of the spirit of that experience. And you do that so when you stop at a stop light, the people around you will be saying, “Oh, I wish I was him. Look how much fun he’s having.” It’s really all about that.

So, this song came on the radio. You can either choose classic rock in that situation, or you can choose country, and I’d chosen country on this occasion. This song was on the radio, and it was from a band called Sugarland and was maybe twenty years old. The chorus goes this way: “There’s gotta be something more...there’s gotta be more than this. I heed a little less hard time;

I need a little more bliss.” It’s a song about how we go through the motions of just getting up in the morning and going to work. Just the drudgery, and you think to yourself, “Surely this isn’t all there is.”

The Easter message is not “More, More,” but “Something More.” There has to be something more.

Outside of my office window is our church’s columbarium. We call it the Memorial Garden, and it’s where people put the ashes of those they’ve lost, that they loved. The remains are put in an urn and that’s put in a niche, and there’s a marker with the person’s name. I will look out my window sometimes and will see someone out there standing, looking at a niche. Often, they’re weeping. They’re sad, and I think to myself, “I need to go out there and remind them of Easter.” And to tell them that when we face the reality of death there’s something more. Don’t let that be all there is in your mind because I promise you there’s something more.

There is a poet named Louise Glück, and she wrote a poem called “October,” and I will say it’s a little depressing. It uses the image of autumn as a way of saying that there comes a point in life when you reach a certain place where you face the reality of your own death. Of your own mortality. She has this one line that really hit me. She says: “You will not be spared, nor will what you love be spared.” It’s interesting because when I feel like when I face my own mortality, when I think of myself not being spared, I think, “I can handle that.” But when I think about the people I love passing away, when I think about losing people I love the most. My wife, my children... I lost my mother ... or close friends. It’s just heartbreaking for me. I think, “Really, they won’t be spared? I know I won’t, but they won’t?” No, they won’t.

Mary shows up at the tomb, and Jesus’ body has been taken away, and she’s weeping outside. She says, “They’ve taken my Lord away; I don’t know where they’ve laid him. I lost the person I love the most.” She’s overcome with grief, that price we pay for love. She is overcome with that grief.

There is a realization that Jesus is the first fruits of resurrection. And that we, too, will be raised. That those who we love will also be raised. That we will see them again. And now, once they’ve gone, once they’ve passed away, we see them only as 1 Corinthians says, only as a reflection like in a mirror. Like we’re looking back. And we have those memories and we’re thinking about them. And all of that is all we’ve got. And it gets sad because sometimes those memories start to blur. But here’s what the passage says, “For now we see just as a reflection but

one day we will see them face to face.” It’s not just that we’ll see Jesus face to face; it’s that we’ll even see the people we love face to face.

There’s a wonderful video I saw recently, and you may have seen some like this. But it really grabbed me. It’s of a toddler, maybe 18 months old, maybe less, and he’s obviously been born with a disability of his sight. He can’t see well. And everything must be very blurry. So, they’re fitting him with his first set of glasses. He’s so cute, sitting there nice and quiet, and they pull this thing down over his head – the glasses are on a band. Round glasses, and they go on his face. And as soon as he gets those glasses on and he starts looking around, his mom is next to him and she’s talking to him. “Can you see? Can you see?” He looks over at her and his face just brightens up with this great big smile. And he reaches his finger out towards her. It’s such a beautiful picture of that joy that overcomes him.

I think that’s what’s ahead for us. For now, we see - an earlier translation was “to see through a glass darkly,” like you can’t quite see it. But we’ll see face to face. We’ll see Jesus face to face; we’ll see face-to-face the people we love.

Now, this resurrection message isn’t just about the fact that one day, when we die, we’ll be raised again. Because resurrection power, the truth of resurrection itself, is with us even now right here in our lives every day. There is a sense that resurrection changes things even as we live right now. The passage from John, the resurrection narrative in John 20, begins with these words: “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. (John 20:1). *“While it was still dark.”*

I wonder if you’ve been in a dark place—a really dark place in your life—a circumstance or situation. The Easter message tells us that when we are in a dark place, there is something more—that even in this life, there is something more.

Craig Barnes is a pastor I love to read. He says this: “Earlier this week a woman was called into her supervisor’s office to hear that times are hard for the company, and they had to let her go. ‘So sorry, they said.’ She cleaned out her desk, packed away her hopes for getting ahead, and wondered what she would tell her kids. Earlier this week, someone received terrible news from a physician. Earlier this week, someone heard the words ‘I don’t love you anymore.’ Earlier this week, someone’s hope was crucified. And the darkness is overwhelming, and no one is ever ready to encounter Easter until he or she has spent time in a dark place where hope cannot be seen. Easter is the last thing we are expecting. Easter is about more hope than we can handle.”

When Jesus speaks to Mary, he calls her by name, and everything changes for her. Then she realizes that God has something else in store for her beyond that dark place.

There is in the Port of Genoa, Italy, a statue. There's also a replica of it in Florida and in Grenada. It is a statue of Jesus with his arms up, kind of like where he says, "Come to me all of you who labor and are heavy laden." That sort of pose. But it's 8 feet underwater, and you can see it. There's light on it so that from above the surface, you can see it. But it is a memorial of all those who have died at sea. But it's called "Christ of the Abyss." I think it's a beautiful picture of when we are in the depths of that abyss; there is a Jesus who is reaching out to us, wanting us to come to him.

Here's what happens when we're in that dark place: sometimes Jesus is hard to find. We think to ourselves, "When I get to that really hard place, Jesus is going to pick me up and carry me through. And my faith is going to be so strong, and I'm going to be able to handle it." Then, when it happens, we think, "Where are you, Jesus? I've been looking for you. They've taken you away, and I don't know where they've put you. All I can do is see this reflection of that time when you seemed so vital and so real for me. And right now, where are you, Jesus?" Well, now we see but a reflection. But there is a place, and a time ahead when God gives us something more. When on the other side of that dark place, there is light, and there's the perseverance of love.

I'm going to do something that's kind of risky. It worked okay at the earlier services so I'm going for it. I wonder how many of you have been in a dark place at some point in your life. If so, I'd like you to raise your hand if you've been in a dark place at some point in your life. So, I'm going to ask you another question. How many of you have been in a dark place, but you're not anymore? That God got you through it somehow. Raise your hands if you've done that. I'll put my hand up – I'll say that for sure. And I want us to look around and think to ourselves – that's a testimony. I could pick any of you – I'm not going to, don't worry – but I could pick any of you and ask you to come up here and stand here and say, "Tell us how you got through. What happened? How are you on the other side of that?" Because God has something more for us. That's the Easter message. On the other side of pain. On the other side of grief. On the other side of darkness, there's something more.

I've been inspired by Paul Alexander. Some of you may know who he is. He is the man who died recently at age 70. He spent his life in an iron lung. He was the last man to have spent a life in an iron lung. He was 70 years old and was diagnosed with polio as a child, and that's what they did. You'd think he was in a really dark place, and I suspect he had been. But they taught him to do this thing called "Frog Breathing," where you can gulp air and sort of force it down into his lungs. That would allow him to leave the iron lung for very brief periods of time. They'd put him in a wheelchair and take him to experience things and then put him back in the iron lung. He had an incredible relationship with his twin brother. He had a caregiver that he loved very much, and she took great care of him. She loved him as well. She passed away, and he went through all that grief. He got a law degree and practiced law out of an iron lung. He said it was always a bit of a shock when the client came into his office, and there was this iron lung there. And he was their attorney.

How easy would it have been for him to say, "This is a dark place, and it's never going to be better than this." But he didn't because he believed God had something more for him. And I don't know anything about his faith life, but I believe that when he reached the end of those 70 years, God had still something more for him. And that broken body was replaced with a new body. Eternal in the heavens. And God had something more for him, just like he does for us.

I hope that in those times when you are wondering where Christ is and you're in a moment of grief, or in a place where you feel trapped, or in a place of darkness, or maybe when you get to the edge of the Jordan River yourself, this one verse from 1 Corinthians 13 will come to your mind: "For now we see but a reflection as in a mirror. But then we will see face to face" because God has something more for us.

Let's pray. *Gracious God, you are a God of something more. You yourself are so resilient that you just keep on loving when the darkness is so great. We believe that when we are in dark places, you are right there to walk us through whether we feel you or not. And you have on the other side something more for us. Oh God, we look forward to that day when we will see you face to face. And see the ones we love face to face. And we will know that your resurrection message is real. And there will be great joy. Amen.*