

## **Easter Sunday**

*John 20:1-18*

**1. Jesus is not where you expect him to be.**

**2. Seeing is believing.**

*- John 10:37*

**3. Not seeing is believing.**

*- John 20:25-29*

**4. Jesus calls you by name.**

*- Matthew 28:20; John 10:3-4*

**5. We must tell others.**

*- John 20:17-18*

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West Valley Church  
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Michael O'Neill

## **Easter Sunday** ***John 20:1-18***

“Humans could one day be brought back from the dead – with the help of a super computer and technology that doesn’t yet exist.” That’s what the article in a scientific journal stated.<sup>1</sup> According the article, here’s how they will one day be able to resurrect you from the dead: after you die, scientists will take your DNA and make a clone of you (that’s step one). Then, (step two) they will cull all the information about you that exists from every piece of data that can be found. This will include your elementary school report cards, any pictures of you, your medical records, your computer data, including everything you’ve ever read or watched or searched for or posted on line, every digital document you’ve written, every video recorded of you, whether by you or your friends or family or zoom meetings or even by the traffic and face recognition cameras out there. Then, once all that data is collected, it will be ordered, examined, and uploaded into your clone’s brain. Or, if they can’t figure out a way to upload data into the biological brain of your clone, then they will create a digital version of you that will exist in a digital world; a computer world where your digitized existence won’t even know that it’s living in a computer video game.

The only problem they have with this solution to death is that it would take a computer so large and so advanced that it doesn’t exist – something called a “Dyson Sphere.”<sup>2</sup> I know that sounds like the newest type of vacuum cleaner or hand dryer, but this is nothing like that. A Dyson Sphere is a computer that was imagined by a physicist in the 1960s named Freeman Dyson. This is a computer that is so large, and requires so much energy to run, that it would have to be built around the sun, with solar panels facing the sun. The computer would have to be so large that it would require every ounce of energy that can be sucked out of the sun to run it – a meager 400-septillion watts per second. It would have to be that large to compute all the data available for every person, and to have the capacity to create artificial intelligence in order to make a digital world for people to exist in.

In other words, *you* won’t really exist, but your data will live in a computer.

Doesn’t give us much hope for a human-created resurrection, does it? I have something better to offer you, and you don’t have to wait several thousand years for the technology. A genuine resurrection of your entire body, soul, and spirit has been purchased for you by the great Creator of the entire universe.

We are here today because there *was* One who came back from the dead! We have hope in the face of death because someone *did* come back from the dead. We can

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a35788050/dyson-sphere-digital-resurrection-immortality/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/deep-space/a11098/dyson-sphere/>

live an amazing and full life now, a life of purpose, because someone *did* come back from the dead. We can live forever beyond death because someone *did* come back from the dead. His name is Jesus Christ, and he is real, he is alive, and he is God. His Spirit is here with us today, testifying to the truth of his resurrection that we celebrate today on Easter Sunday in 2021.

I want us to consider the passage from John 20:1-18 that you saw on the video.

Jesus, the Son of the Loving God, had died a torturous death on a cross after having been literally shredded by Roman torture. He was quickly buried in a tomb since it was getting dark, and they hastily prepared Jesus' body with the Jewish required spices and oils.

The Gospel of John records nothing about the disciples on that first day after Christ's death. Silence. No doubt it was a depressing day. The One they were sure was the Messiah – the one who would liberate people from sin and oppression, the One they gave up everything to follow; the One they *loved*, died.

On Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb to finish with the final treatment of Jesus' body by adding even more spices and ointments.<sup>3</sup>

But to her shock she saw the stone rolled away. She ran to Peter and John, who were the left-over leaders of the group that followed Jesus, and she told them what happened. She presumed that Jesus' body had been stolen. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves, as Mary followed behind. The two men arrived and went inside. They found the grave clothes lying there as if the body just disappeared from inside them. Peter was trying to make sense of it when John remembered – Jesus had promised that he would rise from the dead!

The two guys ran back to tell the others, and after they'd left, Mary arrived. She was still assuming that his body had been stolen. When she arrived there were now two other beings that appeared to be men standing there, and they asked her, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" as if to say, "What do you have to cry about? What did you expect to find here?" She said, "We don't know what happened to Jesus." She was still thinking that Jesus' body had been stolen when she heard another voice behind her, and that voice asked essentially the same question. Without fully turning around, she gave essentially the same answer. Then the man behind her called her name: "Mary." Suddenly, having heard her own name, the truth came rushing like a tsunami into her mind and heart. She whirled around to see Jesus standing there! Oh, how could this be!?

Just a few days earlier than this, Mary knelt at the unscarred feet of Jesus and anointed them with perfume and her tears. Now she hugged his nail-scarred feet tightly because unlike last time, this time she was not going to let him out of her grasp! But Jesus told her it was okay – that she could let go of him, and that she needed to go and tell the others what she had seen and that he was alive.

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 233.

I'd like to highlight some things this morning from this world-changing and life-transforming narrative. It is truth so powerful that, if you will believe it, you will gain resurrection life.

There are several things that we realize from this event, and one of those is that...

## **1. Jesus is not where you expect him to be.**

Mary arrived in the early dawn that morning, expecting Jesus to be in a grave. She expected him to be right where they had left him, all bundled up and beginning to do what dead bodies do ... The spices and oils were supposed to delay the decaying process, but, you know he'd been dead in there for three days already, in his body's torn up condition, and the average temperature this time of year in Jerusalem is at least in the seventies – so, by now, in the words of the King James Bible, “he stinketh.” Mary had prepared herself to deal with all of that, she just needed to find someone to open the tomb for her. But she arrived to find the tomb empty. Jesus has a way of surprising us and doing what we don't expect. He's often not who and what and where we expect him. He's very good at going beyond our expectations.

Where do you expect Jesus to be? Maybe you've come to this place today expecting to see Jesus in a grave. You've never really bought in to the idea that Jesus rose from the dead. Maybe you've been invited here by your husband, or wife, or parents or friends. But if you've come to this place expecting to find a dead Jesus, you aren't going to find *that* Jesus here.

Maybe you've come expecting this to be another boring church service about some old religious stories and myths. But you aren't going to find *that* Jesus here.

God intends for you to encounter the Living Son of God this morning, and your life is going to be radically changed for the better.

Maybe you came because you are spiritually curious about Jesus. Or you've got questions that you thought you'd see if you could find answers to. If you are looking for an oddity or a curiosity, you aren't going to find *that* Jesus here. I'm here today to tell you that Jesus will go beyond your expectations and transform your life into something you've never known before. That's what resurrection does.

Maybe you came today expecting to see a lifeless Jesus in a cavernous cold cave of a church, buried under centuries of tradition, organized religion, and ritual. If so, your faith isn't in a living Jesus. You expect him to be in a dead religion that requires you to carry out rituals; rituals that will somehow qualify you to meet some divine quota for being good, or to get you to heaven. You aren't going to find *that* Jesus here. You *will* find a resurrected Jesus who forgives you and who heals you and who brings you life. You will find a real and alive God.

Maybe you expect to find a Jesus of the middle class; or a Jesus who wants you to be wealthy, or a Jesus who is a Republican or a Democrat or a flag waving American Jesus, or a politician Jesus or a Jesus who is anti-everything you think is wrong in our country. You aren't going to find *that* Jesus here. You *will* find a Jesus who is

alive and loves you and wants to speak to you personally, who cares about your life and the lives of others. You'll find a Jesus who lives in the hearts of rich as well as poor followers, but who is most at home among the immigrant, the broken, and those on the margins of society. And this Jesus turns our hearts toward them.

Maybe if you were honest with yourself, you'd admit that your faith has gotten tired and old, and you really don't expect Jesus to be alive here. You've grown accustomed to a life that lacks spiritual vibrancy. Your head tells you that Jesus rose from the dead, but your heart is as cold as an empty tomb and your life is more religion than relationship. Your life is lived as if Jesus were a distant memory. You won't find *that* Jesus here. But you are going to have an encounter with the living Jesus today that will roll the stone away from your dead faith.

You won't find a dead and lifeless Jesus here, if that's what you are expecting.

In the story of Mary at the tomb, you might wonder why she didn't recognize the angels and why at first she thought Jesus was the gardener. There's a few reasons, first of which was that she came looking for the wrong Jesus. She expected him to be dead. And Mary was so focused on her grief, that through her tears it was difficult to see anything clearly. Because of where she was focused, she had her back to Jesus. To put it simply, she was facing the wrong direction. If you've come looking for Jesus in any of the ways I've just mentioned, as honestly as I can say this, you are looking in the wrong direction, and if you are not careful, you will miss Jesus entirely. That almost happened to Mary Magdalene. Open your heart and turn around to the Jesus who is alive.

The second thing that resurrection means in this story is that...

## **2. Seeing is believing.**

When the disciples saw the evidence – the stone rolled away, the empty and folded grave clothes, the cloth that was wrapped around his head, lying there all folded up, the angels inside the tomb, and then finally Jesus himself, they knew that seeing was believing.

For those of us living in the Pacific Northwest, we see the evidence of Jesus all around us. Drive into the Cascade Mountains or go further to the vast Pacific Ocean or the Olympic Rain Forest and see the breathtaking beauty of creation. You'd have to be the most stubborn of unbelievers to not see at least *some* intelligently designed evidence of the handiwork of God.

For those who believe in Jesus, we can see the evidence of him all around us. We see it when people are healed from hopeless diagnoses. We see it when people are set free from the grip of addictions. We see it when marriages on the brink of destruction are restored, when behaviors are changed and when trust is rebuilt and families are put back together. We see it when victims offer forgiveness to their offenders.

We see it anytime people have the strength and patience to endure unenviable grief and suffering of circumstances.

Jesus said, "Put aside for a moment what you hear me say about myself and just take the evidence of the actions that are right before your eyes. Then perhaps things will come together for you, and you'll see..." (John 10:37, tmt)

Even if you don't believe what *I'm* telling you, just look at the evidence all around you. We live in a world that seems hell-bent on destruction, division, hatred, power, and greed. And yet day after day, in countless lives like yours and mine, love seems to prevail in the darkest of places. Compassion, kindness, and generosity are still virtues. You can see the evidence all around you. Resurrection means seeing is believing.

The third thing we realize this morning about Resurrection is that...

### **3. *Not seeing is believing.***

John was the first one to realize that Jesus was resurrected, and then shortly after, Peter. They looked into the tomb and did *not* see the body of Jesus. They did *not* see a body becoming consumed by the decomposition of death. In fact, they saw *nothing at all*. Their belief came not in what they saw, but in the *absence* of what they saw. Yes they saw the grave clothes – the linens that were traditionally wrapped around a body in burial, with spices and oils folded into each layer, each wrap. In this resurrection story it says that John went inside the tomb and, in verse 8 it says, "He saw and believed." In other words, in seeing the *absence* of the body – in *not* seeing Jesus in there, he believed.

At first, they thought that perhaps someone had stolen Jesus' body. How else could you logically account for a dead man's body gone missing?

But there's something interesting that happened here.

First of all, the fact that the grave clothes were neatly laying there indicated that the body was *not* stolen; who would steal a body by carefully pulling it out of its grave clothes? But it was even more than that. The original language paints an interesting picture. The grave cloths were not all wadded up as if someone had unwrapped the body and tossed them aside, or even folded them back up afterward. Instead, the original language describes the grave clothes as though they had just collapsed; the clothes were still wrapped, with all the spices and oils still intact in all the folds. It was like Jesus' body just sort of came through the cloths and they just collapsed. The body should've still been in the undisturbed grave cloths, but it was just...gone.

Some of you are struggling to believe in Jesus today because you can't see him. But if you look at what you *can't* see, you *will see* Jesus. I'm here to tell you today that NOT seeing *is* believing!

For instance, I've seen the most amazing things happen to people who have faith in Jesus. They face situations that seem to have no hope at all. They get a cancer diagnosis, or they find out they have some other heart-wrenching, debilitating or

fatal disease or condition. Their financial situation suddenly turns south through no fault of their own. They face circumstances that are very bleak and totally without hope. And yet time and time again, these believers in Jesus see hope where there is no hope. In the absence of what can be seen, they believe.

I've been in this business long enough that I've officiated at all kinds of funerals in all kinds of situations, from babies to suicidal teenagers to cancer stricken young adults to aged-out seniors. I've seen people cut short in the prime of their lives. I've seen believers at the funeral of one of their beloved family members – someone who had lived a long, great life. You'd think the whole family would be filled with empty grief. And yet in the absence of that loved one, they found great hope in resurrection life and heaven and they praised God. In the midst of what they could *not* see, they saw Jesus.

Later in this chapter of John, after Jesus had risen from the dead, he appeared to his disciples several different times. But his disciple Thomas wasn't there. In fact, Thomas had yet to see Jesus. When his friends and fellow followers tried telling Thomas about Jesus, his response was, "I'll believe it when I see it!" So the next time Jesus appeared to them, he made sure to do it when Thomas was there.

This is how the story is told in John 20:

The disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" But his response was, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." Then, eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, just like before, Jesus was standing there among them. Jesus said, "Peace to you." Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe."

Thomas said, "My Master! My God!"

I want you to hear what Jesus said in response to Thomas: "Jesus said, 'So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe *without* seeing.'" (John 20:25-29, niv)

I'm telling you today, in the very places where you *don't* see hope, where you *don't* see a way out, where you *don't* see any direction for the way ahead, you *can* see Jesus. *Not* seeing is believing!

Jesus often is *not* where we expect him to be – he will exceed our expectations. We've realized that if we'll open our eyes, seeing is believing, and even NOT seeing is believing.

And as we've been in this room together today, many of us have been praying that *your* heart might become open to an encounter with the resurrected Jesus that is beyond what you'd expect, that is evident both in what you *can* see and what you *cannot* see. But it's more personal than that; *you* must know that because of the resurrection...

#### 4. Jesus calls *you* by name.

In the story, Mary did not recognize Jesus. We've already said that it was because she was looking in the wrong direction. She expected Jesus to be one way and he turned out to be another. She was so caught up in her grief that she missed the seen and unseen evidence. And then Jesus himself appeared to her and she still didn't recognize him! So he called her by name. When he said, "Mary!" she *knew* it was him. She was so moved, she fell at his feet and hugged his legs tightly. This time she wasn't going to let him go! But Jesus said, in essence, "You don't have to hold onto me so tightly. I'm here for you and always will be. You don't have to be afraid of losing me." Remember, Jesus made a promise:

"I'll be with you...day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."  
(Matthew 28:20, tm)

So he was telling Mary that she didn't have to be afraid because he would never leave her, and in so doing, he is saying neither will he leave *us*. All of that was communicated in response to his calling her name.

My first name is a fairly popular name; there are a lot of "Mikes" in this world. There are even some "Mike O'Neills" in this world – there's an actor, a famous photographer, and a professional soccer coach. Believe it or not, there was another Mike O'Neill in my high school. In fact, he not only shared my first and last name, he had the same middle name, and it was all spelled exactly the same: Michael William O'Neill. And he was *exactly* one year younger than me. Same birthday, one year younger than me. In high school he seemed to get in trouble fairly frequently. Several times, I would get a notice with my name on it from the school office saying I needed to come down and see the principal, and when I walked in the office the ladies would say, "We got the wrong one again. Go back to class!"

It was my name, but it wasn't me they were calling. Compare that to when my wife, Shelly, calls my name, there's no mistaking it. She doesn't even have to say my whole name (if she does, it means I'm *really* in trouble!). But if she just says, "Michael," I know that it's *her* voice calling me. Her voice, calling my name, is packed with meaning because she knows me better than anyone else in the world. I know in that instant that it is the voice of someone who loves me, and at times I don't understand why. Someone who knows all my mistakes and all my baggage and yet she loves me anyway. When she calls me by name, I *know* it, and I know she knows me. It can be in a crowd, but I'll hear it and I know my name is being called by someone who knows me very, very well.

Jesus is here this morning, and he's calling *your* name. He knows you personally. He's not calling someone else by the same name. He's calling *you*, and you know it. He knows everything about you – all your sins and all your baggage and all your garbage – and he loves you completely. And when you hear him call your name, if you will answer, He changes everything.



But you must respond. When Mary heard Jesus calling her name, she responded by saying, “Rabboni!” Now that’s an interesting title. Normally, Jesus would have been called “Rabbi,” which means “teacher,” and “Rabboni” is derived from that word. But “Rabboni” was rarely used and it is distinctly different than “Rabbi.” The word is reserved for addressing the ultimate teacher: God. When Mary heard her name spoken in love by the resurrected Jesus, her response was everything: “You are more than a teacher, you are my God.”

I’m praying that you hear Jesus calling you by name, and you will realize who he is and how much he loves you. But you must respond with the recognition that he is more than a teacher; he is *your* God.

Jesus said this about himself in John 10:

“(I) call (my) own sheep by name and lead them out...and they follow (me), for they recognize (my) voice.” (John 10:3-4, tlb)

He is calling you by name today. He knows you and he loves you. And if you listen carefully, you will hear him. And today you can respond to him. You can turn to him. In faith you can call him your God, and you can become his follower.

Will you?

The disciples came to the tomb on that Sunday morning – a morning much like this one. And the first thing they saw was the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. That started everything. They realized that Jesus does far beyond what we expect him to do – he rises from the dead! And they believed because of what they saw and even because of what they did not see. And he called them by name. All of that can be true for you today.

If you want to respond to that Jesus today, In a moment I’m going to invite you to come up here and pick up one of these stones. A stone is just symbolic of the stone that was rolled away from the grave, a stone that began a sequence leading to the lives of the disciples being radically changed by Jesus – Jesus who is real, who is alive, who is God, and who loves you. Resurrection means your life can be changed by a God who exceeds your expectations, will be with you in ways you can see and will be with you in times that you can’t always see. He knows you personally, and you can have Him with you forever.

I can’t think of a better day for you to acknowledge the resurrected Jesus and let him change your life, to be present with you forever. If you want that – you want to answer Jesus’ calling you by name, if you answer by calling him *your* God, then you will want to come get one of these stones. You can choose a black one or a white one – just like the icon behind me. But they have inscribed on them the word, “Believe.” If you are choosing to believe and live your life for a risen Jesus, please come forward and take one.

Maybe you want to refresh your faith and restore your relationship with Jesus today. Maybe you’ve realized that you need the living Jesus to breathe life back into your dying and fading faith. Then you will want to come get one of these stones.

Please come as the worship team leads us.

*Prayer*

There's one last thing that resurrection means. It means...

## **5. We must tell others.**

After Mary heard Jesus call her by name and she recognized him for who he was, Jesus told her this:

“Go find the others and tell them.” (John 20:17, tlb)

If you came forward and you have acknowledged that Jesus is the resurrected God and he is YOUR God, then Jesus is telling you to go and tell others. The story tells us she told others:

“I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.” (John 20:18, niv)

It is your turn and mine. We are to leave this place and tell others that we've seen Jesus, and tell others what Jesus has done for us.

**Stand with me please.** Now, may you leave here having been changed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May Jesus Christ himself always exceed your expectations. May your faith in Him grow stronger as you sense his presence in your life both in ways you can see and ways you cannot. And may you leave here determined to tell others all that Jesus has done for you; to tell others that you have seen the Lord.

Amen.

Thank you for coming!