

New &amp; Wonderful Possibilities 2022

John 20:1-18

## John 20:1-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. 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 hold on to 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.

For \$49.99 or \$21.94 plus shipping for the paper back,  
 Amazon will sell you a book, that in 432 pages promises to cover,  
 “Everything You Need to Know About the World and How It Works”.

**Everything you need to know about the world and how it works.**

Though I trust that it probably is a very fine volume,  
 and packed with oodles of wonderful facts and information,  
 that claim, strikes me as maybe a bit over the top...  
 ... surely a few things worth knowing may have slipped past the authors.

In our science classes at school we’re taught  
 that there is always a rational explanation for everything,  
 and that eventually everything fits within  
 physical laws of nature that can be tested.

So we’re pretty sure  
 we can understand and can explain how the world works,  
 and so we live out our lives accordingly.

We’ve also learned by experience and from the school of hard knocks,  
 that life can be unfair, disappointing, harsh and difficult,

and that when we bump into walls of life's adversity  
we don't always fully recover well from our losses ...  
... and so we live out our lives accordingly.

We also know to be realistic, to be cautious and suspicious in life.  
We've learned to look for selfish motives and hidden agendas.  
We recognize that sometimes, things are beyond rescue,  
and that somehow we must learn to live & endure anyway...  
... and so we live out our lives accordingly.

Mary Magdalene knew all about how the world really works,  
for that had been  
brutally pounded into her on Friday at the crucifixion  
as she had watched Jesus suffer in agony on the cross.

Mary had traveled with Jesus, and her life had been transformed.  
Then stood with his mother and the others, looking on as he died,  
and later, she helped prepare his tortured body for the tomb.

She was realistic enough to know that it was all over,  
for she knew all about how the world really works,  
and had no choice but to live out her life accordingly.

Easter begins with Mary coming to the tomb in the predawn darkness.

In John's gospel, darkness has meaning beyond just the literal,  
It's more than the physical darkness before the coming sunrise.

"While it was still dark" also refers to the moral darkness  
of such violence and the conniving treachery of human depravity.

"While it was still dark" also represents the emotional darkness of  
Mary's feelings of crushing loss & overwhelming despair of grief.

"While it was still dark" can also mean  
being in the dark about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mary came to the tomb in the dark of that Easter morning to mourn.  
The other gospels describe the women coming to the tomb  
with spices to complete the task of preparing his body.

Mary arrived knowing it was over, and that death is always the end.  
She knew very well how the world really works,  
and tempered her hopes and expectations accordingly.

For us today, more than two thousand years later,  
the soul-crushing horror and shock of it all are distant  
and seemingly somewhat removed from our experience,  
nevertheless, in our living we too know something about  
the hollow feelings of personal devastation & disappointment,  
the numbing darkness of despair, of the future torn asunder.

I read recently that psychologically our world, our culture,  
that we are not just worn-out and exhausted from Covid,  
but that it's destruction and damage runs much deeper---  
- people are on the verge of total burn-out and feelings of hopeless defeat.

As John tells the story, when Mary got to the garden --  
the great stone blocking - sealing the tomb had been rolled away,  
and knowing how the world works and seeing the empty tomb,  
obviously, someone had taken his dead body,

robbing her of even that final good-bye.

Later when Peter & the disciple looked inside the empty tomb,  
they too saw something that they could not easily explain.

The burial wrappings were still there in form - but no corpse,  
as if his body had evaporated right through them.

The shape & condition of the burial cloths made no sense at all.

If the dead body had been taken, his messy, bloody crucified corpse,  
then grave robbers would hardly have unwrapped the body,  
or taken the time to leave the grave cloths behind  
they knew that's **not** how the world works.

But actually no one had taken the dead body of Jesus,  
but rather, a resurrected and living Jesus Christ  
had left death behind along with the burial wrappings.

Turned out that the way they thought the world works, **was wrong-**  
there was more ... much more than they thought or knew,  
for the end ---- really wasn't the end at all,  
**which is the true message and meaning of Easter.**

There was a time when as a young man  
I had drifted far from church and an active life of faith.  
I was lost in questioning doubt, cynicism and indifference,  
and wouldn't have anything to do with church or religion,  
for at that time, pretty sure that I knew how the world works,  
I didn't care and I didn't see the point.

Then, my employer relocated me, and I felt alone in a strange place.  
A postcard came from a nearby church about their Easter worship,  
so, on a whim, after all those years, I decided I'd attend.

Though I think I understand it better now,  
at the time, I couldn't have told you what brought me there,  
for I really wasn't expecting much or looking for anything.

But once there, I experienced something unexpected,  
a welcoming hospitality, a feel of warmth and renewed hope.  
I found myself thinking about spiritual matters,  
and reconsidered my life's direction and my goals.

**Something happened and I felt the gracious love  
of our God who doesn't quit nor give up on anyone.**

Back in those days before smart-phones, I carried a Palm Pilot.  
On the back of it, there was a little hole,  
and when my Palm Pilot got messed up and wasn't working right,  
I could stick a paperclip in that little hole,  
and it would reset the whole thing,  
and delete everything for a fresh start  
by taking it back to exactly how it first came out from the factory...

**... and I think God's grace works something like that...**

...that God embraces us in our brokenness, our failures and weakness  
in order to restore us, release us, heal us, fix us and set us free.

On that first Easter, going to the tomb in the dark of early morning,  
Mary Magdalene's world looked pretty bleak and hopeless,  
whatever Jesus had been about, seemed to be defeated & gone.

But the way everyone thought the world works - **was wrong & deficient**,  
because there was more -- much more than anyone knew ---  
and because Jesus was resurrected,  
we can know & trust there is something wonderful and amazing  
and full of hope far beyond the way the world seems to work.

These next verses are my favorite part of the whole Easter story  
that even the evil they intended, even death and the grave  
could not restrain or hold back God's love, and leap of life.

Listen for the love, for the joy and hope in these verses, vs. 16-18.

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to 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.

It's interesting, she recognized Jesus when he called her by name,  
and what a moment and experience that must have been  
as no doubt she retold her story through the years...

... then she responded, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher)  
wanting to see and hold him just as she had always known Jesus...  
... but it couldn't and wouldn't be that way anymore,  
Jesus wouldn't be physically present anymore, not as Rabbouni.

The old days of before the crucifixion were not coming back.  
The resurrection is not a return to the past or to what had been,  
but it opened up a whole new future of possibilities and change...  
... and so Jesus tells Mary, tell my disciples, 'I am alive'.

It was not the evidence of the empty tomb or folded grave-cloths  
but her reality was changed when Jesus called Mary by name...  
just as the Good Shepherd knows us and calls us by name.

Easter is not about making a few minor repairs and adjustments,  
but it is the promise and hope **of something entirely new**.  
Jesus was not resurrected to resume his ministry in Palestine,  
but raised to leave for the Holy Spirit to come & dwell among us,  
**and for the power, the promise and presence of God with us now.**

So for us, Easter is not just celebrating the resurrection of Jesus  
as an historical event of more than twenty centuries ago,  
and Jesus is not just a sacred memory of some distant past,  
but through the Holy Spirit,  
Jesus is a continuing presence & person who seeks to make us whole,  
and gives us hope for even in the worst situation and loss,  
as his gracious love & compassion still calls us by name.

In stark sharp contrast to how this world seems to work,  
God intervenes - God raises the dead, God sends the Holy Spirit  
and absolute defeat turns into glorious victory and joy.

And so Mary was the first,  
the first to proclaim the Good News of Easter ---  
**the very essence of Christianity: "I have seen the Lord" -**

- and the fact that Jesus was raised by the Father,

is divine vindication of the life, words and deeds of Jesus,  
his death overturned by a **higher judge**, by the Lord God.

This is sure proof and assurance that life is stronger than death,  
that God's love is stronger than sin and the grave,  
and that Jesus Christ is our risen Lord and Savior,  
who still lives and calls us into relationship by grace,  
even the roughest places in life.

and brings us through

Easter places new and wonderful possibilities before us,  
that wherever we are, whatever our circumstances,  
sin, death and defeat do not have the last word...

... and our hope rests upon God whose power and mercy have no limits,  
who offers possibilities beyond what we ever hoped or imagined.  
Easter is responding to Jesus calling us each by name,  
offering the grace of all the second chances we need ...

... and much like resetting my old Palm Pilot,  
it's a total reset and a fresh and whole new beginning.

It was on Easter, those many years ago,  
that I heard God's grace & mercy call my name, inviting me back.  
When I responded my was life enriched, my goals & hopes transformed,  
beginning a wonderful process **that still continues to bless my life**.

It started as a call to come home, and for my faith to refresh anew,  
which required more than the simplistic answers of my childhood,  
so it could withstand the storms and challenges of adulthood.

For faith to be alive, it must constantly deepen and grow stronger  
so that it can live and breathe, respond and serve  
even amid the complexities and uncertainties of our lives.

On that distant and wonderful Easter of long ago, I was reclaimed,  
and so today I echoed with Mary, "I have seen the Lord",  
and that glorious truth has made all the difference to me,

... for that glorious truth began a process of transforming my life,  
and it became the hinge and hope upon which my life turns,  
as the story of Jesus Christ intersected with my own.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about truth and renewed hope.  
It's about promises fulfilled, for us to believe and be blessed  
with hope, courage and strength for our own resurrection  
and our transformation toward new possibilities and joy --

-- for it's true, the Lord is risen, He is risen indeed!