

# John 20:1-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Are you longing for a change? Have you got used to saying about life, that is just the way it is.

Some of us have been round the block a few times, some of us more than others, to know that even though life does offer new and exciting prospects, what the writer to the book of Ecclesiastes says is true, that under the sun there really is nothing new.

Maybe we've lost the idealism of youth and we've become a bit more realistic, maybe a bit more cynical. Well John says to you though, have you not heard of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

As we approach Easter time, we're going to spend three lunchtimes in this chapter and the first section that we've read this afternoon, which is a glorious but deceptively simple portrayal of the events two weeks, in the two weeks after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

And in this chapter John speaks to us on many levels. He wants to get us thinking not just about whether the resurrection actually happened, for him that is a given actually, but why the resurrection of Jesus Christ matters.

[ 1 : 30 ] He doesn't want to just ask us the question, do you believe that it happened? But he wants us to think why we'd want to believe it happened. And in the chapter we get three moments, three separate occasions where the once dead, now living, Jesus Christ appears to different people.

And this afternoon we're going to look at his appearance to Mary. And we see that in Mary there is someone who is used to things in the world as they are.

And she meets someone who is going to breach the same old, same old of the world as it is in her life. The risen Jesus Christ is going to break all of the rules that she is so familiar with.

Mary's story is important, isn't it?

Because Mary's world is the same as our world too. And first of all we see that Mary's world is a world where some things never change.

[ 2 : 43 ] Where some things never change. It's true, isn't it? Much of life is routine and repetitive and familiar. And that's okay, isn't it?

That's just what life is like in the world. There are the everyday things that we have to do again and again. The light things, the ordinary things, the mundane things of life.

And somehow we get through them, don't we? Going to work, changing nappies, buying food.

Whatever it is, routine stuff. But some stuff in this world is routine and it really shouldn't be.

Some routine stuff is far more serious. The same old, same old stuff of the world that really is quite disturbing. Even though it may become normalised in our minds.

And we see here, don't we, Mary, deal with the routine and familiar experience of death. Just look at verse 1.

[ 3 : 51 ] Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. Those words say it all, don't they? She comes to cope with this routine and changeless grief of the world that she knows.

Same things that you and I have been dealing with ever since. The common experience of visiting a grave. John tells us that it was dark when she visits the tomb of Jesus Christ.

It's early in the morning. She wants to get there, doesn't she, to mourn. To mourn the loss of her friend. Of her loving Lord. Of her master. But for John, darkness actually is very significant.

This is the darkness of the world as it is. The ordinary world. In subjection to frustration and to death.

A world where visiting a grave is routine. It happens every day. I don't know if you noticed in the reading, the word tomb.

[ 5 : 02 ] Keeps coming again and again, doesn't it? It comes twice. Once in every two verses on average. In the passage. We're constantly reminded as Mary comes to the tomb.

Of the presence of death. And the reality of it. The world that she knows is one characterised by this one journey.

From the cradle to the grave. You know the manufacturer of computer games, Xbox. The machine, Xbox.

They did an advert a few years ago. Trying to advertise their games console. And the advert showed a woman giving birth. And in the moment of birth.

The child in comedic fashion. Is kind of launched out of the womb. And through the hospital window. And flies like a bullet.

[ 6 : 00 ] Through the air. And we watch as this baby. Flies through the clouds. And in a matter of seconds. Grows.

To be a little boy. His scream. Eventually deepens. To a man's yell. And within seconds. As he's flying through the sky.

Over the English countryside. He changes. He grows older and older. It's as if a lifetime flashes before us. In a matter of seconds. The boy becomes a teenager.

And a man. And then he loses his hair. And his teeth. And his skin gets wrinkly. And suddenly he takes his last breath. Before landing to perfection.

In a pre-prepared grave. Smash. The screen goes dark. And it's followed by the strap line. Life is short. Play more.

[ 6 : 58 ] Buy an Xbox. The advert got banned. Because it was tasteless. But actually it got banned. Because in reality.

It was true. It was too close. To the truth. Of the reality of. Things in this world. From the cradle. To the tomb. And Jesus has been no exception. Has he? Life is short. And death is routine. In Mary's world. Even for Jesus. And his friends.

John tells us. It's the first day of the week. And it's been. Hasn't it? One hell of a weekend. Literally. But the disciples have seen. Their new hopeful.

Butchered. And executed. The son of God. Killed. And now the new week comes. Doesn't it? The Jews have had their day off. On the Saturday. The day of rest is over.

[ 7 : 54 ] And now it's back to the same old. Same old. It's like our Monday morning. Isn't it? Back to business as usual. Normal things in the world. That Mary knows.

Resume after the weekend. Normal work. The work of anointing bodies. The work of rolling stones away. The work of tomb visits.

Back to the work of dealing with death. Life. And what Mary expects is entirely normal in that world that she knows. Isn't it? She expects to come to the tomb.

To get the stone rolled away somehow. And to anoint the body. Back to the routine. To the routine of darkness. And of death.

And a graveside visit. The writer Quentin Crisp said. Life was a funny thing that happened to me. On the way to the grave. And this is.

[ 8 : 54 ] This normal world. Where some things never change. From the cradle to the grave. The apostle Paul says that ever since the time of Adam.

Death has reigned in this world. And so normal is that reign. Is that dominion over us. So normal and ordinary now in a sense.

Is that dark. That for Mary she cannot imagine or dream of anything else. Can she? Mary is conditioned by this world.

You see. When she sees the stone rolled away. What's the reason she gives? She's not thinking resurrection life. Is she? No. Verse 2.

They've taken the Lord out of the tomb. She thinks foul play. Grave robbers. That wasn't uncommon. By verse 11. She is still weeping at the tomb.

[ 9 : 55 ] She'd love it to be different. Wouldn't she? But that's just the way it is. In this world. A world where death is routine. Where life is short.

In this old world. And like Mary. We have been shaped by it. We have been moulded by it. You have been moulded by it.

Pain has shaped you. Stunted by the changeless. On and on and on. Of loss. And of death.

And that kind of change that Mary is about to witness. Is too good to be true. Isn't it? In the world where some things never change.

Our same old world of tombs and spices and mourning and grave time. It is why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is just so hard to believe. Isn't it? It's just out of the ordinary.

[10:58] It is a world where some things never change. But then as she meets the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly. She witnesses a brand new day.

There is a brand new day. For John. It is literally a brand new day. Isn't it? On the first day of the week. It's the morning. Early morning. It's Sunday.

And she is shaped by pain. She comes with behaviour that is fitting for the world that she knows. She comes mourning. The first day of the week.

In verse 1. That is a loaded phrase. In John's mind. Because John isn't just thinking that. I need to write down the date here. For posterity.

Like a newspaper. John is thinking about the week. As it is in God's plan. And where the week features.

[11:54] The plan for God's creation. Remember how he starts his gospel. You might know how he starts his gospel. In the beginning was the word.

And that is an echo, isn't it? Of an even more famous line from the Bible. The first line of the Bible. In the beginning God created. As John writes about the first day of the week here.

He is thinking in creational terms. He is thinking about the whole world. As it is now. Or as it once was. And how it is about to be transformed.

In a new creation. In the beginning God created. All things in six days. And then he rested. And so when a new week comes.

On the day of Jesus' resurrection. It is not just a new day. It is not even just a new week. It signifies a new creation. Notice the questions that Mary is asked.

[12:56] The angels seem quizzical. Don't they? In verse 13. Woman. Why are you weeping? And we think, don't we? Well duh. Isn't that obvious?

Yes. But that question. Is a good question. Because weeping. Is appropriate. Only in the old creation.

That Mary knows so well. In that world. There are old time habits. And ingrained behaviours. That now are no longer required.

And needed. Because now. It is a brand new day. It is a brand new creation. And there is this cradle to the grave man.

Who has breached. Into a new world. And brought it into this creation. He has literally risen. Through the wrappings.

[13:51] Of the old creation. Hasn't he? Through the world of the tomb. And he's left those things behind. The things of the world that Mary knows.

And there is something otherworldly. About the risen Jesus Christ. Isn't there? Mary doesn't recognise him at first. And can you feel the irony of verse 15?

Just look down there. Jesus said to her. Woman why are you weeping? Who are you seeking?

Supposing him to be the gardener. She said. Sir if you've carried him away.

Tell me where you've laid him. Do you feel the irony there? The one that she's asking for an explanation. Of the empty tomb. Is the one who was in it.

But she can't see that. That reality. That reality that is broken in. To the world that she knows. Is so out of the ordinary.

[14:50] So opposed. So alien. To the same old same old world. That she knows. To our world. But. It is a brand new day.

It is the beginning of a new creation. In Jesus Christ. And his appearance. Marks. A complete shift. In the way of things.

In the way of creation itself. It's one of the reasons why. The writer John. Is so adamant. That the resurrection. Is an historical. Physical.

Tangible. Reality. It's not a metaphorical story. Is it? With a nice meaning. To kind of think about. It's not folklore. It is real.

These things happened. In creation. And this is important. Not just that we might have evidence. For the resurrection. It is important.

[15:49] So that we know. Christ's resurrection. Is about this. Real world. It is a creational moment. It is a shift. In the real world. A day has come.

At the resurrection. Where God. Hasn't just done something new. In the world. He is making a new world. Notice Mary goes to grab him.

Doesn't she? He is touchable. We learn. Later in. In John chapter 21. That. That. The resurrected Jesus. Cooks breakfast. And eats it.

He has a real physical body. The resurrection. It takes the stuff. Of real physical things. And. And creates them anew.

In the same old world. Mary meets the risen Jesus. And is shown a brand new creation. A new creation breaking into this world.

[16:47] In a brand new day. And so. Thirdly. And lastly. A new day. A new creation. Means a new message. For Mary.

A new message. Which. You know the TV show. This is your life. It's coming back. So Michael Aspel. Used to get the red book. Didn't he? And.

Bring back people from the past. That the celebrity knew. Don't worry if you haven't seen it. You're not missing much. But at the end. There is always one person.

Who means most. To the celebrity. And. Michael Aspel. He has the line. Isn't it? This is a voice. You weren't expecting to hear. A face.

You weren't expecting to see. And there is this. Personal. Reunion. In. Verse 16. And 17. Isn't there? Between.

[17:42] Mary. And. Her risen Lord. And sometimes. Less is more. Because each of them. Just say. One word.

In this meeting. Mary. Rabboni. We just pause there. Don't we? To take in that moment.

The anticipation. Has been building. Throughout the passage. And suddenly. Mary. Sees. The newness. Of this. This day. John.

Gives us. Her words. In the language. That she would have spoken. In Aramaic. Just. It just brings out. The depth. Of emotion. Doesn't it? And the personal nature.

Of this love. Shared. And she goes. To embrace him. What seems. Odd. Then. Is that. Jesus. Refuses. That embrace. Doesn't he?

[18:40] Do not cling. To me. Mary. Mary. And he explains why. And we see that. It isn't that Jesus is. Kind of cold. And standoffish. Or. Sort of emotionally.

Unintelligent. About what's going on. In the situation. That he tells us. That there is something. Greater. That he must do. Than being here.

In this world. As it is. That he must. Ascend. To the father. To your father. And to my father. He says. Mary. Mary. No. This. This. Is not the point.

Of my resurrection. The point. Is not. That you. Might bring me. Back. Into your. Same old world. Into.

The creation. As you know it. That is not. How it's going to be. Because. I am going. To take you. Into a new creation. The resurrection. Is not just.

[19:34] For you. And the disciples. As lovely. As it may be. To have me around. For a bit. A bit longer. Jesus. Has more in mind. Doesn't he? He will not stay. In the old world.

Order. With us. But he will bring. Us. Into a new one. With him. And so. Rather than. Stay. And embrace. The command to Mary.

In verse 17. Is. Go. Go. And say. To the brothers. This. New day. This new creation. It means. A new mission. For Mary. A new message. And she leaves. Saying. I've seen. The Lord. Do you see. What Mary. Is trying to do here. She is trying.

To recapture. Isn't she. Something that. That she knew. Of Jesus. In his. Incarnate. Ministry. In the life. Of Jesus. And the relationship.

[20:27] They had. In the old. World order. She wants. That back. And we understand. That. Because. Pain. Has shaped her. In this world.

But Jesus. Says. No. There is. Much. Much. More. And he will. Ascend. And he will. Pour out. His Holy Spirit. And. And foreigners. And outsiders.

Will be brought. Into the church. And the old. Will pass away. And the new. Will come. New creation. Go. Says Jesus. This.

Moment. For Mary. Is not at all. What she expected. Is it? Because it was. Back to business. In the old. World. In the world. Of dark. In the world. Of death.

But the appearance. Of Jesus. Resurrected. From the dead. Is a glimpse. Of a new world. Breaking in. And because. That moment.

[ 21 : 23 ] Is not just. For her. Not just. A new day. For her. He says. Go. Go and tell. Perhaps.

Pain. Has shaped you. In this world. Visiting graves. Maybe you can't. Imagine. This to be true. John tells us. This happened. And it was the first day. Of a new week. The first day. Of a new creation. Mary.

Went. To the tomb. But she. Came away. Telling her brothers. I have. Seen the Lord. Some things. Never change.

Do they? The dark things. But the resurrection. Tells us. It is a brand new day. Let's pray. Amen.