

1

John 20:1-18

Jesus Christ Lives!

A couple of months ago I heard a story on the news about a mother and daughter who had been separated for 23 years. They were victims of a child abduction.

The daughter Carlina was stolen from a New York hospital when she was very ill as an infant.

Now an adult, Carlina and her mother Joy were reunited with great joy and tears of happiness.

Woman, why are you crying?

Crying for the joy of being together again, for the tragedy of lost years, for all they had missed.

There was no way to reset time and get those years back. No way to restore what had been taken from them.

Only a way to go forward---to walk out of the darkness of their separation and move into the light of being reunited. The joy of the mother knowing the daughter was still alive.

And yet the next part of the story also sees the mother crying.

Crying because she is now estranged from her long-lost daughter even though she now knows where her daughter is.

Carlina doesn't really know her mother. At 23 years old, she has grown up without her and doesn't have any idea how to relate to her. All she knows how to do is to call her mother and ask for money.

And so the mother cries.

Woman, why are you weeping?

4

For the lost years, the lost relationship, for losing her daughter a second time.

She cries because her dreams and hopes for this reunion did not happen the way she thought they would.

She cries because her daughter is not who she expected her to be. She doesn't recognize her.

They don't recognize each other.

When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb in the dark very early on Easter morning, she found the stone had been rolled away. Fearing that someone had stolen the body, she ran and got John and Peter. They ran to the tomb and found it empty. Then they went back home.

But Mary, not knowing what to do or what to think, stood outside the tomb, weeping.

When she got brave enough to look into the tomb herself, she saw two angels, who asked her,

Woman, why are you weeping?

And she answered,

“Because they have stolen away my Lord and I don’t know where they’ve put him!”

23 years ago, Carlina’s mother cried, “Someone has taken my baby and I don’t know where she is!”

Mary went back out of the tomb. She saw a man. She thought he must be the gardener.

Now, Mary was very familiar with the way Jesus looked, so why would she make such a mistake?

Maybe she was crying so hard she couldn't really see, or maybe she didn't make eye contact with a man she didn't know.

Or maybe it was similar to those times when you see someone in a different place than you usually see them.

Haven't you done that? Haven't you run into your child's teacher or the grocery store clerk you always see when you shop, or maybe your mailman in some place you're not used to seeing them,

And you know you know them, but you just can't figure out who they are?

Mary did not expect to see Jesus up and walking around. She had watched him die. She had watched him placed into the tomb.

Maybe she didn't recognize him because this man just **COULDN'T** be Jesus! This man was alive, and Jesus was dead!

He wasn't at all what she expected.

Woman, why are you weeping?

I don't know where to find my Lord.

He was standing right in front of her, but her expectations meant that she didn't recognize him.

Sometimes, when we don't live as though Jesus is alive, I think we don't recognize him, either. Sometimes we feel like Christ is not with us and it's really because we don't recognize him.

2000 years ago people expected the Messiah to come and kick the Romans out of Israel and when that's not what Jesus did, some people failed to recognize him.

Instead, they crucified him!

His followers knew that he was dead, and so they failed to recognize him because he was alive.

So what happened to show them it was Jesus?

For Mary, she recognized him when he spoke her name. In his voice, in his naming of her, she realized who he was.

Later, the followers who were walking to Emmaus recognized him in the breaking of the bread, something they had seen Jesus do often. In his actions, they saw who he was.

And for Thomas, recognition came when he touched the wounded places, the scars of crucifixion on Jesus' body.

People knew it was Jesus Christ by what they heard, saw, and touched.

How do we recognize Jesus today?

He is still alive, after all! He has ascended to heaven, so we no longer see him with our eyes or hear him with our ears or touch him with our hands.

But Christ is still alive among us! Maybe we don't recognize him because we don't expect him to be alive!

After all, it's been 2000 years or so since the crucifixion, and he ascended into heaven 40 days after the resurrection, so maybe we have forgotten how to recognize his voice.

Maybe we no longer know how he does things.

Maybe we don't see the scars anymore!

What do you expect Jesus Christ to say, to do, to look like?

Maybe our expectations are more along the lines of saving us from political enemies, from a bad economy, from corrupt corporations, or even from natural disasters.

We are not safe from those things, so maybe we feel like someone has taken away our Jesus and we don't know what they've done with him!

And instead, he is right in front of us, calling our names, still being the bread of life and the living water giving our spirits what we need. He is right in front of us, calling us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

He is still commanding us to love each other the way he loves us.

And when other parts of the Body of Christ are speaking to us, doing what Christ does, and showing us who Christ is, we don't recognize him.

Because we're expecting someone else. We look at Christ and we think he's the gardener because our Jesus is --
--

Something else entirely. Someone who is angry or punishing or against certain people. Someone whose grace is only for a select few or people who meet a given set of criteria.

Someone who will overthrow the bad guys.

And we can't recognize Christ whose grace is for all, who died and was resurrected so that we could be saved from sin and death and raised up to eternal life by hanging on to him as he is raised from the tomb.

We can't recognize him because he doesn't meet our expectations.

We are among the dead, looking for Christ, when we ought to be looking for him among the living!

Why do you look for the living among the dead? The angels asked Mary. Because we think he's dead.

No! Christ is alive! Living and walking and speaking among us!

Look around you and see the light of Christ in the faces of others! Look around you and see the love of Christ lived out in your relationships with others!

Look around you and see the Body of Christ who feeds the poor, forgives others, loves God and neighbor!

Listen to him calling your name and know that he is right in front of you in the fellowship of sharing food together and in the caring and prayers of others for you!

See the wounds of his suffering in others who have sacrificed so much to be disciples of Christ---those who have put themselves on the line to follow Christ---to truly be the Body of Christ!

And then you will believe that
CHRIST IS ALIVE!! And your rejoicing will be from the
deepest part of your soul.

Imagine that mother and daughter realizing that they
have a deep and abiding bond, just because of who they are.
Imagine them reuniting once again, this time with the
daughter accepting the true and powerful love the mother
feels for her.

Imagine them establishing a trusting, lasting
relationship as the daughter learns to recognize the name her
mother calls her, which is not the name she answered to
growing up.

Imagine the scene all over again, this time with a happy ending, with the two of them together forever in a loving relationship.

The rejoicing would never end. The delight in each other would be constant.

That is the rejoicing and the delight Christ feels when people finally hear Christ's voice speaking their names--- when they finally recognize Christ, who loves them and cares for them. It is the eternal "alleluia" that happens when we recognize that Christ is alive and standing right in front of us.

Listen for your name! Christ is calling to you! Christ loves you! He is not dead, but alive!

And he offers to us grace and forgiveness and mercy.

He lifts us up from the dark tomb of death into the light of eternal life with him.

Christ is alive!

Hallelujah! Amen!