

*Sermon on John 20:1-18 for Easter prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

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

### **Jesus is the treasure our hearts are seeking.**

This morning at our home there was a treasure hunt. Anticipated each year. The benefactor of this hunt acquired gifts that would taste sweet on the tongue and smooth to the touch. It was not a difficult hunt but effort had to be made by the hunters with minimal clues as to the treasure's location.

I can report that each treasure was found and joy ensued for all involved. Of course, these were just Easter Baskets... but I think the fun of hiding, and finding them points to a human inclination that is meant to lead somewhere glorious.

We love treasure hunting... The possibility of loot being discovered piques our interest and whether we are the hunters or just random spectators we anticipate the finding.

It is what drives the Goonies. It is what has generations of people trying to decode *The Secret* (book with clues and gemstones hidden in different cities). It is what we hope will be at the end of the rainbow and on the spot marked by X.

While it is easy to see treasure hunting as hunger for gold and gems. Humanity has a built in hunting mechanism that is always searching, always seeking treasure. That which will finally satisfy. That which will answer the hurt, erase the pain, prove the point.

Many of the treasures we chase after are good but many deceive us and we fall for booby traps that leave us ensnared. We are made to hunt for treasure. But the treasure is not always what we think it to be...

Each one of us is living a treasure hunt, some of us realize it, familiar with real treasure; some of us are still figuring it out.

Easter is the perfect day to know the treasure that matches the deepest longings of your soul.

From the account of Christ's resurrection, we witness those that were seeking and have found hope in Jesus and this is what we want to reflect upon on this glorious Resurrection Sunday.

*Context of John 20:1-18... whom do you seek?*

Reading from John 20 is like starting at the end of a good book, reaching the pivotal moment in the story without understanding the characters and what is really on the line.

But this is the result of the ministry of Jesus. The Messiah promised in the old writings, the hoped-for King. Born a child, in the muck of creation. Faithfully living an extraordinary sinless life through really ordinary everyday life.

He eventually began to preach, to teach those that would listen, of the coming kingdom of God. That which had been anticipated for so long that it almost became a forgotten memory.

Jesus was unlike any other religious leader. He talked of relationship with the Father, with God in heaven, and he empowered the average person to reach him in prayer. A prophet not for the elite of society but who called the outcasts to himself showing their value.

There were miracles, the untouchables restored, the sick healed, the dead brought to life. All confirming the things he taught with authority.

All of that was too much for those in charge and he was put to death. Tortured on a cross as a traitor, a blasphemer. We learn that this death was actually for us, to solve our guilt for rejecting God.

But the experience of that day cast a dark shadow for those who followed him. Dreams seemingly dashed on that cross. Has the good thing come to an end? Waiting, wishing, hope-fading.

In this story of seeking we see two keys that free us to find Jesus and find hope in him.

## **Seeking is Human**

In the tension of a Saturday of waiting... these disciples of Jesus know they are incomplete without him even if don't know precisely why.

Here is the pivotal moment of the story - the tomb meant to keep the miracle-working teacher, the king who has come - is empty.

We see Mary Magdalene coming to finish the preparations for burial that were cut short by the Sabbath. And instead of Jesus' body, she sees the stone rolled away. She runs to Simon Peter and John, other followers of Jesus...

**John 20:3–8** “So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. [4] Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. [5] And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. [6] Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, [7] and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. [8] Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;” (ESV)

Mary is there to accomplish a task, to honor her Rabbi, but he is not there and it is a spark in the darkness of waiting that launches the disciples to run to the tomb.

From the fulfillment they felt with Jesus, the truth that he proclaimed, the hope of his Kingdom, they want more. They seek.

For those that knew him, they couldn't help but seek him and soon they would give their lives to seek and share him with others.

And that is a totally human response. To seek.

We come with built in longing. There is something about us that keeps us pursuing. Every rock is overturned until we find what will match what stirs inside of us.

Endless is the list of things our hearts attempt to cling to for wholeness. Things we think we can trust, that we give our lives to. And it is all seeking after God.

It is a human impulse to seek after God. In the depth of our soul we are made for it. Now, we confuse the longing for other things, end up “worshipping” idols of self and created things...

**Acts 17:22–28** “So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” (ESV)

Jesus comes and tells those that believe in him, if they seek him, they will find him.

**Matthew 7:7–8** “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (ESV)

Oh that our seeking would be sanctified and we would find what our hearts hunger for in Jesus.

**Isaiah 55:6–7** “Seek the LORD while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
[7] let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (ESV)

He was found that Sunday and he can be found today.

### **Jesus is Our Treasure**

After John and Simon return home, Mary lingers and has an encounter with Jesus that gives us the same hope she experienced. It is for us an invitation to resurrection life.

Why is she there - in her grief? What is Mary’s story? We first hear of her at the outset of Jesus’ ministry.

**Luke 8:1–2** Jesus “went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, [2] and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,” (ESV)

There have been many rumors about who Mary was but we are told in Scripture that she is from Magda (given her name) and that she had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus.

Lived seeking treasure in the wrong place. Left her broken.

We can only imagine the torment she was under. The struggle, no end in sight. At a place of no hope, Jesus intervened and she gave her life to follow him. In a world where she was unvalued, unseen, Jesus gave her place and purpose. And she followed him to the foot of the cross, where most of the men that called him

Rabbi had run away, Mary is with the Mother of Jesus, watching her deliverer die.

And here she has returned to care for him still. Oh, her grief at his death, having heard his teaching, seen his miracles, ministered alongside him. And he was gone. Hope erased by a Roman cross.

We can have a sense of this devastating grief only because we too live in a painful world. Where anxiety rules. Where loss is part of the human story. Confusion. Violence. Greed. Abuse of power. All things we come face to face with.

But it is at the end of hope that Jesus rushes in.

“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? **Whom are you seeking?**” Supposing him a 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.”

Everything changes when Jesus says her name.

A parable experienced...

**John 10:2–4** “he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. [3] To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. [4] When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” (ESV)

What it must have been like to have Jesus say her name. But the experience is not just for Mary, it is now a spiritual reality for those Jesus still calls today.

“Casting herself before the risen Lord, she would have clasped His feet, but He said, “Do not cling to me” Thrilled at having Jesus alive again, Mary’s love was of a nature which leaned upon the human presence of Jesus. Along with the other disciples, Mary, too, had to learn how “to rise to a higher and at the same time a

nearer, but spiritual communion with Him.... Her earthly affection needed to be elevated into a heavenly love” (John 20:25-29).”

And this spiritual communion is for all who believe in him, that he handled your sin of rejecting God and making yourself king, that he gave his flesh to be broken for you, and his blood shed for you as a new covenant of grace. Redemption secured by the only true God.

Jesus is the treasure we long for.

Becoming spiritually united with him, his righteousness, his inheritance, his security.

Mary becomes his witness proclaiming, “I have seen the Lord!” The resurrected king reigns and he can be known.

This is the extravagant hope of the resurrection. To see Jesus, to believe in him, and to live.

The resurrection and the calling of Christ moves us from the general hope of **John 3:16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” To the personal reality of **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (ESV)

This is what the resurrection delivers. And you can believe in it - honestly, if Jesus was not raised from the dead you would never have heard of him!

This is real hope - the solution to every iota of pain. The place of identity, of fulfillment, of peace. He is the Lord you can give everything over to. The answer to all our seeking. The treasure your heart longs for.

And it is meant for you - the resurrection, the revelation of Jesus in Scripture, the hope he has placed in others around you; they are all his calling your name - that redemption would be yours.

**Jesus is the treasure our hearts are seeking.**

Whom are you seeking?

Like Mary turned to Jesus in response - will you turn to him and make him the most important thing about you? That you too may announce with joy, "I have seen the Lord!"

The prize for all who seek after Him and find him for he is not far. The amazing grace of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. A savior that calls us by name, a purpose of making him known, bringing renewal to others and all things, and a future of eternity with him.

Treasure found.

Let's seek him together.