

“Do You Know Me?”

John 20:1-10, 11-18; Acts 10:34-37; Col. 3:4

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Some of you may have seen that with all of the dark gloom and joy-less doubt that has pervaded our nation for the last month, some people decided... especially since they had a lot of time on their hands at home... that they would pull out those barely-dusty Christmas decoration and put them back up. Aside from giving them something to DO, the main thing that it was a diversion that would bring them JOY... memories of a season that is, at least in theory, to be one of HOPE. Something much in demand these days... Oh, and not to mention all those ‘recycled’ Hallmark Xmas movies...

Perhaps with Christmas as a subconscious ‘backdrop,’ I read the passage from John in which Mary meets up with (whom she believes to be) the ‘gardener.’ Now, does anybody but ME think this to be, shall we say, *random*?! **A ‘GARDENER?’** Well, first let’s bear in mind that NOTHING in God’s Word is ‘random’... it ALL has a purpose. What this tells me is that while we probably always think of the empty tomb to be out in a remote, rocky part of the Jerusalem hilly countryside, it was likely in a location in which it would have been surrounded by a... GARDEN. You know, a place of growth, of beauty... of LIFE! Hmmm... like Jesus Himself! Jesus’ tomb was in a place with beautiful flowers... just like our cross! (and screen). But, I digress... that’s just a little food for thought for later...

The main point is that she didn’t RECOGNIZE Jesus. Even though she had spent the better part of three years in what would appear to be DAILY contact with Jesus. But here she treats her Lord like a perfect stranger. You would have thought He had never existed. It was only when He spoke her name, **“Mary,”** that the little light went on.

And as I saw in my mind’s eye Jesus, in effect saying ‘Mary... do you know me?’... that my mind went to Christmas movie. One that, for many (including ME) this holiday season isn’t complete without watching: *“It’s a Wonderful Life.”* (A phrase that many folks in our country might struggle with right now). I know that most ALL of you know the premise of the story. Thinking that his life has been of no value, George Bailey gets his wish in a dream: he was never born... so, therefore, none of his friends and family know who he is. The question he asks time and again... “Do you know me?”... is

answered with blank stares and crazy looks. When he awakens from his dream, he knows that his loved ones really DO know him, and love him, and appreciate all that he has done for them. He realizes that his has truly been ‘a wonderful life.’

As I thought about Jesus, and how Mary Magdalene didn’t recognize the One she had been so close to, I thought about how He was in effect saying the same thing: **“Mary... do you know me?”** And how we are not so dissimilar from Mary. Many of us have spent countless hours in worship, in study, in prayer. If anyone should know Jesus, it is you and me. AND YET... sometimes we don’t even recognize him when He’s staring us in the face. NO, not directly... but present in the faces of those we come in contact with. We don’t see him in situations and circumstances in which we don’t see how He could possibly be present. Sometimes our vision of Christ can be clouded by our own DOUBT, and FEAR; or, by our human PRIDE in our own ability to ‘fix things.’ Perhaps... like TODAY!

So, for a few minutes let’s consider what we can learn from Mary about recognizing Jesus in our midst. How Jesus is saying to each one of us, **“Do you know me?”**

Well, for one, Mary didn’t know it was Jesus because of her **emotion**. Emotion that, of course, came out of a good place... LOVE. But, yet, emotion that no doubt clouded her judgment. In the devotional Wednesday I touch on both the benefits and detriments of ‘emotion’ in making good decisions. As far as our ‘worship,’ and ‘prayer,’ and talking with others about our faith, I believe we could sure use a little MORE ‘emotion.’ BUT, when our emotions keep us from thinking clearly, it is NOT a good thing.

I thought it was interesting that both Jesus and His holy messengers asked her, **“Woman, why are you weeping?”** (John 20:13, 15) Like, why WOULDN’T she be?! She was coming to pay her respects to someone she dearly loved and the object of her affection was GONE. Wouldn’t TEARS be the ‘natural’, HUMAN reaction? Yes, of course. But what Jesus had been communicating for 3 years is that He was ‘super-natural’... not merely human, but also DIVINE. That even though he was to suffer a terrible death, he

would in-deed and truth be raised to glorious life. Each one of the 4 Gospels attests to what the Savior/Teacher was trying to teach his 'students':

"They will condemn him (the Son of Man) to death... and kill him. Three days later he will rise." (Mark 10:34) "Jesus told them that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (Matthew 16:21, Luke 9:22) "I am the resurrection and the life. ...whoever believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

When Mary comes to the tomb so distraught about his 'disappearance,' Jesus had to be disappointed that one of his 'star pupils,' in the emotional pressure of the moment, appeared to have forgotten the answer to the #1 question on the 'final exam' on the Savior's life: ***"On the third day be raised to LIFE."*** Perhaps shaking his head in disappointment, Jesus was saying, 'Mary... do you know me? ... **Do you believe what I've been telling you...?**'

And she I'm sure that deep down, Mary DID believe. But besides her **emotional** state, another factor was likely the **loss** of His **physical presence**. That 'Rock' that she has always counted on had been taken away from her. Without being able to lay eyes on her Savior and Lord, part of her had been lost. Gone was her **security**, her **strength**, her **confidence**, her **hope**, her **JOY**... along with that empty tomb, Mary was also suffering from an empty HEART. She was no doubt mourning the loss of her relationship with her friend..

Can we not relate in our own experiences TODAY? How much are each and every one of us lamenting the loss of the physical presence of those whom we love? Those friends and family from whom we receive reassurance and wisdom, hope and JOY! Are not we all experiencing an emptiness in our hearts as we mourn the loss of relationships... temporary, yes, we know, but for HOW long...? Aside from how such **Isolation** leads to **loneliness** and **depression**, there can even be those fears that ones we love... especially the very young and the very old... won't even recognize us anymore. Fears that we would have to look them in the eyes and ask the question to which we might not like the answer: 'Do you KNOW me?'

To allay such feelings and fears, it simply means that we must work all the more

diligently on STAYING connected. To be open to new and different ways of communicating with one another. I would suggest to you that we all need to rely more on **'E-MOTION.'** The value of maintaining our human connections 'electronically'... which requires action... MOTION! Motions like... what we are doing here THIS MORNING! Facebook Live. FB Messenger. YouTube. FaceTime. Text msgs. And of course, the 'old reliable standby'... the original 'live' medium of a PHONE CALL! Knowing that none of these must ever take the place of spending TRUE 'face-time' with one another. For THAT is what real relationships are made of... Relationships that we KNOW can never really be taken away, because they are indelibly printed on 'hard drive' of our hearts. Our internal **'Heart-drive,'** if you will...

The same goes for the quality time we are to spend with our Lord Jesus. We can use those same 'E-sources' to grow in our relationship with Christ... worship and devotionals on FB, small group meetings on Zoom, YouTube videos of teaching and music, countless online learning resources. But none of these can take the place of a real, one-on-one, 'in your face' relationship with JESUS. The most important 'facetime' we can have is with our Lord, falling to our knees in humble **prayer**. No matter what physical distance we may have to have from one another, the One who will NEVER leave our side... the only One who can, and does, violate that '6 foot social distancing'... is GOD. The One who promises ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*** We may have had to give up any hand contact with one another, but the hand of God is always extended to take ours... if only we will take hold of His! No 'hand sanitizer' necessary... now, 'heart-sanitizer,' maybe...

In closing, I would leave you with a quote from a column I recently read in the American Press newspaper: *"Christ is Risen Indeed. I cannot think of another Easter in recent memory when there was a bigger need for hope. So many people find themselves feeling anxious. Fears about the future abound."*

The author of that quote was a Dr. John White, former pastor of FBC-LC... written on April 4th...2010. TEN years ago! Like that old saying says, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Anxiety... fear... they have always been with us. We STILL

have an ever-increasing need for HOPE... and PEACE... and LOVE. In our homes... our neighborhoods... our state... our nation... our world. Now more than ever...

As we re-member... and indeed, as we seek to re-LIVE... the examples of early followers of Christ like Mary, and Peter, and John, let us bear in mind those words from Acts I read earlier... the 'act-ions' of the early church:

"In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message ...preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread..." (Acts 10:35-37)

How will that 'message spread' ... that saving message of the living Christ, NOT the spread of a deadly, destructive virus? Only as we are able to answer one simple question. The question asked to each one of us by the Risen Christ: **"Do you know me?"** Consider your answer wisely...

Prayers of the People: O God, our ever-present companion, we belong to each other. We belong to You. This journey we travel is like a labyrinth. A maze that we may not fully comprehend its meaning. But one that we know ultimately leads to the Center... the center where we find you waiting for us. Lord, help us to know and be assured that you are sovereign, that you are all-knowing, all-powerful and ever-present. We know you are a good God who holds us in our anxiety and distress and who has a plan for our future. Calm our hearts and minds and give us hope in you, our only certain hope.

Triune God, you exist in eternal relationship. You are One and yet are three. In a time of isolation, draw us closer to this mystery. May it remind us of your truth: even in physical isolation, we are never truly alone. Your love links us together, making us a people. For the Bible also says: We belong to each other. We belong to you. Even now. Especially now. Amen

***When Christ who is your life is revealed,
then you also will be revealed with him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)***

"Household Prayer: Morning": Jesus, victorious Lord, I exult in your resurrection. As I sing "alleluia" with my voice, let my life embody "alleluia" as a testimony to your love and a witness to your eternal life. Amen.

"Household Prayer: Evening": Lord, the days of sadness are over, for you have risen from the dead. As you conquered the grave, free your servant from fear of harm or death, that I may rest in peace this night and in the morning rise to sing "alleluia." Amen.