

**A New Man and Woman in A Garden**  
**John 20:1-18**

Brothers and sisters, friends, guests and visitors... for the past three weeks we have been preparing for Good Friday and Easter Sunday by reviewing the biblical concept of Covenant.

We have been looking at what a Covenant is, how it defines the relationship between God and humanity, what the responsibilities and benefits of a Covenant relationship with God entails – and how our inability to be faithful Covenant partners with God is what makes Good Friday and Easter Sunday necessary, and what Christ accomplished on those days - something to celebrate.

And one of the things we discovered is that Covenant defines our existence. Because right at the very beginning when God created everything He was actually setting up a Covenant between Himself and all that He had made.

And Adam and the woman would be the focal point of God's creation – through making them in His image, they would

stand as His representatives to the Creation, and as the Creation's representatives back to God.

So God put Adam in a beautiful garden – and made him the gardener and told him to develop the garden and take care of it. There was only one condition – He must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam was God's representative but He was not God...

Only God determines what is good and what is evil – and to demonstrate that God determines that it is not good for Adam to be alone. So He causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep – and as the scripture tells us, removes a rib bone – and from that part of Adam He makes a perfect partner for Him.

When Adam wakes from his deep sleep – God brings the woman to Adam and he immediately recognizes the good work God has done and how the woman is the perfect partner for him.

Adam writes the first love poem on the spot saying *“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”* (Gen 2:23)

And then the scriptures say that *“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* (Gen 2:25)

And as we looked at that original Covenant of Creation – we realized that what it does is cause us to admire the purity, the honesty, the unspoiled beauty of what God had first made.

And in receiving such a glimpse, a vision, a description of what things had been like at the very beginning before sin – we see the difference between then and now. And perhaps we might wonder and ask – could it ever be that way again?

Could things ever go back to that pristine, naked and unashamed purity of the Garden of Eden - between husband and wife, men and women, humans and nature, between humanity and God?

And maybe thinking about that question brings to mind situations in our own life where we wish things could return to how they once were...

Maybe we wish we could turn back the clock so that we could be healthy and full of energy like we used to be in our 20's...

Maybe we wish we could recapture the romance and passion that once characterized our marriage... or that we could be close to our kids, or our family members like we used to be.

Or maybe that our work, our career, our business would once again generate the enthusiasm and profitability it used to.

Maybe we don't like the person we've become, and when we look in the mirror we wish we could go back and be the person we were before life made us bitter and cynical.

And what about our faith? Maybe we wish that it could be real and vibrant again as well!

That we didn't have the doubts or uncertainties that have crept in over the years, that we could actually believe like we used to – before we realized that such things are really for children – like Santa Clause and the Easter bunny.

Can things ever be the way they were once again? And brothers and sisters, friends, visitors and guests as you think about that question and keep it in mind, I want to ask you to consider another question...

What do you keep as a memorial from that time that you wish things could be like once again?

Is it a high-school or college yearbook, a photograph of happier times that sits on your desk, some kind of trophy or award that you earned for your hard work and success, or it's the reason why you to listen to the music of the 70's or 80's?

What do you hold onto to help keep the nostalgia alive and to - though you might never openly admit it - keep hope alive.

The hope that somehow things could go back to the way they were once again.

Now if you can recognize this in your own life friends, then you are more likely to understand why Mary Magdalene was on her way to Jesus' tomb early in that morning.

Now that Jesus was gone, her life would never be the same. The experiences of His life and ministry would remain only as memories – but in going his grave and being close to where his body was buried, it would help her keep those memories alive and to relive the time that she had spent with Jesus.

It would help her hold on to and cherish the life changing ministry and freedom that she had received from Him. Luke 8:2 tells us that Jesus had delivered Mary from demon possession – he'd cast seven demons out of her.

Before Jesus came into her life Mary was living a tortured existence in captivity to Satan.

And if you are an astute reader of the four gospels you will start to piece together that Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and the sinful woman who poured her tears and perfume on Jesus feet and dried them with her hair – these are all one and the same person.

So then, in addition to delivering Mary from the Satan's grip on her life, Jesus had also assured her that she was forgiven for the promiscuous lifestyle which had given the enemy the opportunity to demonize her, or perhaps the demonization had led her into that lifestyle... at any rate she had been freed and forgiven. And, Jesus had also raised her brother back to life after he had been dead and buried for over four days.

(John 11)

No wonder Mary who loved to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him teach (Luke 10:39) even when there were important preparations to be made for serving Him a dinner of honor... No wonder she not only followed Jesus but also helped support and fund His ministry. (Luke 8:3)

The days and months she had spent with Jesus after He had set her free and forgiven her and brought her brother back to life had no doubt been the absolute best days of her life – nothing could compare with them... and now with Jesus gone – how could anything more amazing ever come along again.

So we can understand then why Mary goes to the tomb – to remember and hold on to those days.

And we can understand as well then why she is so distraught at finding the tomb disturbed and she immediately concludes that someone has stolen His body... and continues to believe this even when she sees two angels appear in the tomb and is confronted by Jesus himself.

And the Apostle John includes this natural reaction of Mary as a part of his proclamation and argument that the empty tomb means Jesus is no longer dead. It's as if to say *"Yes, at first some of us thought that the body was stolen as well – in fact we were quite convinced that is what had happened, but..."*

When Peter arrives at the tomb he goes inside and then so does the other disciple, and John is careful to mention that both of them (so as to constitute a testimony of two witnesses) saw that the cloth which Jesus' body had been wrapped in was simply laying there and that the cloth which covered His head was exactly where it should be.

Which means that no one had stolen the body since the grave-clothes would have been taken along with it. Nor would Jesus' enemies waste time putting the head-covering back in place once they had removed it to confirm it was Jesus' body.

So the disciples report that the evidence at the tomb does not point to the body having been stolen – Jesus body is simply not there anymore... so something else must have occurred!

John hints that indeed it is the resurrection when he says in vs.8-10 that *“the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the*

*dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.”*

And it's important for John to proclaim that the disciples believed in a resurrection of some sort at this point because then it makes a stronger case for what happens to Mary next.

Without details that disprove Jesus' body had been stolen and that the empty tomb means that he is somehow alive... Mary's subsequent claim that she had met Jesus on her own becomes suspect as a grief induced hallucination or as she initially thinks, that she met someone else - like the gardener.

But with the disciples confirming that indeed the body has not been stolen – then Mary's encounter with the Risen Lord and the message which He instructs her to carry to the disciples is verified as true.

And... more importantly - as John's gospel describes this encounter - an answer the question *“can our world ever be like Eden again?”* is put forward and that answer is YES!

The apostle John sees this encounter between Jesus and Mary taking place in a Garden as God pressing the “restart” button for His Covenant of Creation. The first man and woman in the garden failed the test of Covenant faithfulness, they ate from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and sin was let loose in the creation - and the world was cursed.

But now that Christ’s death has atoned for sin, forgiven it and broken the curse of death - a new beginning is at hand. As a result of the resurrection and the empty tomb John sees and wants us to see a New Man standing in a garden with a woman – God is starting over without wiping everything out.

Just as God brought the woman to Adam after he awoke from a deep sleep, Mary is brought to Jesus after he is resurrected from the slumber of death.

Just as the Woman will partner with Adam to fulfill God’s command to be fruitful and multiply, Mary will partner with Jesus to bring his message to His disciples that will result in the good news spreading – and the gospel bearing fruit and

the multiplication of those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Thinking I’m reading a bit into things here... well, this is why both the angels and Jesus address Mary as “woman” echoing Adam’s words *“she shall be called woman”*

So can our world become like Eden again – Yes! And Jesus’ resurrection both starts and seals that renewal and restoration so that as the video said earlier on in the service – The Resurrection – literally - changes everything!

That is amazing news for us - and especially for Mary who has just discovered that beyond all hope Jesus is alive.

The person who is responsible for the best days of her life has just come back – like her brother Lazarus had – and she is overjoyed at the prospect of once again being able to be with Jesus, just as she had been before.

But brothers and sisters, friends, visitors and guests – this is where we need to understand the difference between coming back to life and Resurrection...

Mary thought that Jesus had not simply come back to life as her brother Lazarus had, but something far more profound had occurred – and this is perhaps why she did not recognize Jesus until He called her by name, and it is why she continues to call Him “Teacher!”

But Jesus had been resurrected, He hadn’t simply come back from the dead – He had gone through death and defeated it! The difference being that every other person in scripture or in reality who has come back from dead eventually died again and stayed dead.

But not Jesus – His death broke the power of sin, the curse of death no longer holds over His life, no longer holds power over His Humanity – He is in possession of a life that is everlasting in both quality and quantity!

Now, Mary does not realize this, she’s only thinking that things are going to be able to go back to the way they were, and so Jesus needs to gently break the news to her that it’s not going to be like before – it’s going to be even better!

This is why Jesus has to tell her *“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* (vs. 17)

When the disciples hear the message they will remember that only a few days earlier Jesus had told them *“I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”* (John 14:28-29)

And the disciples would also remember the reason that Jesus had told them he would ascend to His Father was so that *“the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”* (John 14:26)

And when Jesus tells Mary she must carry this message to the disciples, He makes a point of saying that His Father is also their Father; that His God is also their God – so what are the disciples to make of this? What should we make of this?

Well, the Apostle Paul suggests in Romans 8 that this will be the result of Jesus sending the Holy Spirit to his disciples and followers.

Paul explains that *“those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God... And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”... Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”* (Rom 8:14-17)

And the glory of Jesus Christ is what will make it possible for Mary’s life, the disciples’ lives, our lives, and this world... to not only be like it was once before – but become even better!

As the apostle Paul says *“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”— the*

*things God has prepared for those who love him— these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.”* (1 Cor 2:9-10)

Through the Holy Spirit we receive the “life in abundance” full of love and joy and peace that Jesus came to give us. Through the Holy Spirit we actually come to know Jesus and the Father in a way that is more intimate than those who saw Jesus face to face before His resurrection.

And the Holy Spirit we receive from Jesus is a seal, a deposit, a guarantee that we will have a place with Jesus when He returns and transforms this world into the new heavens and the new earth. (Eph 4:30)

But brothers and sisters, friends, visitors and guests – we must also heed Jesus’ words to Mary *“Do not hold on to me...”* and apply them to ourselves as well.

It’s easy to misapprehend Jesus at His resurrection as simply coming back to life, and through that misunderstanding attempt to make the events of Easter Sunday into a glib



reassurance that those situations in our lives which we wish could be like they were before – will somehow miraculously change because miracles can happen! To that misapprehension Jesus gently says “Do not hold on to me...”

Listen closely and clearly friends - the good news of Easter is not that miracles like coming back from the dead are possible... it's that Jesus' resurrection has broken the power of death and is going to the Father to send us the Holy Spirit in order that we might receive His new life!

Listen closely and clearly brothers and sisters - you don't need a miracle so that something in your life can be like it once was... you need the Holy Spirit so that your life can be even better, in ways that you don't yet quite fully understand.

When we are full of the Holy Spirit, we are energized by serving the Lord and showing his Love and mercy and sharing the gospel of forgiveness... and even as we get older and our bodies age when we are full of the Holy Spirit we can say with Paul that *“we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are*

*wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”* (2 Cor 4:16)

When the Holy Spirit is active in our life we can see why we've lost that passion and spark and romance in our marriages, we can take ownership for the reason why we are estranged from our children or our families...

When we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit we can be healed from the wounds and injuries that have made us angry and bitter and cynical...

You see how this works... and when the Holy Spirit is working in us in any of these ways then we automatically are starting to experience our faith again – in new ways that will take us past our doubts into a deeper understanding of God as our Father, deeper than we've ever had before.

So if Easter is not about the miracles we wish for - how can we receive the Holy Spirit whom really need?

It's simple really – think about the fact that something in your life is not the way it once was, just as you know this world and all that is wrong with it is not the way God first created it.

Then simply admit to God that you play a part in that, that you have contributed with your own sins to how this world is not what it was first like – in whatever way you know you have, you can even use whatever is wrong in your own right now to help you identify that.

Then ask God to forgive you for that sin through Jesus' death and resurrection and then ask Jesus to fill you with His Holy Spirit and trust in faith that He will.

This is what we are instructed to do by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:38 *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Believe the promise in faith.

So brothers and sisters, friends, visitors and guests – you have come here on Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection, and maybe in some way this is how you hold on to the hope you have that something in your life could be different than what it is like right now.

I pray this morning you have found your answer in this picture of a New Man and a woman in a Garden on a Sunday morning – that things will not necessarily be as they were before, but in fact they will be better!

Remember – Life comes through Death, Victory comes through Defeat, the first shall be last while the last shall be first (Matt 19:30), *and our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* (Rom 8:18)

Christ has died, Christ has Risen, Christ has returned to the Father, and Christ will come again.

Amen.