

The First Christian - John 20:1-18
Argyle – 2/26/17 – Encounters With Jesus (Keller)

Introduction to Scripture

I want to begin this morning by showing several short clips from one of my favorite movies, *The Princess Bride*. Buttercup, the princess bride, has been kidnapped by a group of bandits. They are pursued by the Dread Pirate Roberts. (Show video). “Inconceivable.” I love when Inigo Montoya says, “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.” We could say the same thing about the word “faith.” A lot of people say they have faith in Jesus, but there seems to be a lot of different meanings to that word. I have talked to people who say they have faith in Jesus and I am tempted to say, “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

We are going to look at a passage this morning that helps us to define what faith in Jesus Christ really is. John 20 is a passage we often look at on Easter or when we are preaching on the resurrection. Today we are going to mine it for insights on what it means to have faith in Jesus Christ. (Read) (Pray)

I want to look this morning at three things we learn from this passage about faith in Jesus.

Faith Involves Embracing Certain Facts about Jesus

First, I want you to see that faith involves embracing certain facts about Jesus. You don't need to know everything about Jesus to have faith in him. In

fact, no matter how long we live and how many times we study the gospels, we will never know all there is to know about Jesus. However, there are a few key facts you and I need to embrace in order to be a Christian. They are summarized by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15. He wrote, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”(I Corinthians 15:3-4) When Mary Magdalene went to the graveyard that morning, she had no trouble embracing those first two facts. Although she wouldn't have understood the significance of it at the time, she knew that Jesus had died and been buried. In fact, she was at Jesus' tomb that morning to help finish preparing his body for burial. The beginning of the Jewish Sabbath on Friday had cut short the burial process for Jesus' body.

What Mary didn't embrace and, in fact, had a hard time embracing was the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. To her, that was “inconceivable” even though on several occasions Jesus had told his followers that he would be killed and then rise again. One of those times was in Mark 10 where we read, “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand

him over to the Gentiles,³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” (Mark 10:32-34)

This is the third time in three chapters in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus made this prediction. Yet, none of Jesus’ disciples including Mary Magdalene expected that to happen. They weren’t hanging out by Jesus’ tomb waiting for Jesus to rise. The women who came to the tomb that morning came with burial spices to anoint a dead body. When the angels ask her why she is crying, Mary tells them that someone has taken Jesus body away.

I want you to stop and think about this for a minute. Although Jesus’ body is missing, the cloths of linen that had been wrapped around it were still in the tomb and they were still intact. Why would someone who was stealing Jesus body go to the trouble of unwrapping those grave cloths and carefully putting them back in place? As many investigators have pointed out over the years, the condition of the tomb that morning supports the idea that Jesus rose from the dead more than it does the theory that someone stole the body.

And then there was the angels. We are told in the Bible that sometimes angels come disguised as human beings. That was not the case of these angels that Mary talked to. Matthew described one of the angels this way. “His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” Even in the presence of the

angels it doesn't occur to Mary that Jesus could have risen from the dead. To her, that was "inconceivable."

So, if you are a skeptic about the resurrection, you are in good company. Mary Magdalene, Peter, John and all of the other original followers of Jesus were skeptical, as well. In order to become Christians we need to embrace certain facts about Jesus, but Jesus resurrection is something that we are probably not going to be able to embrace on our own. It's too inconceivable. In order to embrace the resurrection we are going to need some help. That takes us to our second point.

Faith Involves Encountering a Living Jesus

The second thing we learn from this passage is that faith involves encountering a living Jesus. What was it that convinced Mary that Jesus was alive? What moved her from the inconceivable stage to the believing stage? It wasn't Jesus' predictions ahead of time. It wasn't the empty tomb. It wasn't the grave cloths. It wasn't the appearance of angels. Listen again to how John described what happened. "At this, [Mary] turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher)." What caused Mary to believe in the resurrection? It was when she encountered the living Jesus.

That's how it was with Peter, too. He had heard the predictions, as well. He, too, had seen the empty tomb and the grave cloths. He had even been with the most of the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them the night of his resurrection. Still, it wasn't until Jesus appeared to him after that night of fishing on the Sea of Tiberias that Peter was fully convinced.

And then there was Thomas who wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the rest of them. He famously said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe him." A week later Thomas and the rest of them were together and Jesus came to them. Singling out Thomas, he invited him to put his finger in the nail holes and his hand in his side." Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus came to Mary and she believed. He came to Peter and he believed. He came to Thomas and he believed. Jesus came to Saul, that great persecutor of the church, on the road to Damascus and he believed. That is what grace is. God taking the initiative to help us overcome our spiritual blindness. God taking the initiative to show us that we are sinners in need a Savior. God taking the initiative to reveal Jesus to us and the significance of what he has done for us on the cross.

When did you first encounter with the living Jesus? For me it came during the 20 minutes at Young Life camp. Those who have been to YL camp know what I am talking about. At YL camp they tell kids what the Bible says about Jesus and their sin and Jesus' death on the cross and how to become a Christian. At the end

of the week they give you 20 minutes on your own to think about what you have heard all week. They encourage you to talk to Jesus about what you have been learning. I talked to Jesus for the first time during that 20 minute time at a YL camp in Colorado 40 years ago. I had said prayers before, but I had never talked to the living Jesus.

Have you ever had an experience like that? Have you ever encountered the living Jesus? If you haven't, ask him to come to you and reveal himself. Take a chance that he really has risen from the dead and talk to him.

Faith Involves Entrusting Your Life to Jesus

One other thing we learn about faith is that it involves entrusting your life to him. An encounter with the living Jesus who died, was buried and rose again is transforming. We don't hear anything else about Mary and Thomas after their encounters with the living Jesus, but we do hear a lot about Peter and Saul, who we know as Paul. They both entrusted their lives to Jesus and were transformed. They became leaders in the early church. They wrote letters that became part of the New Testament. They were imprisoned and suffered for being Christians.

Peter said it this way - "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade..."(I Peter 1:3-4) Paul wrote about his transformation this way - "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. The life I live in the body

I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”(Galatians 2:20)

Have you entrusted your life to Jesus? Maybe you like Jesus. Maybe you have know a lot about Jesus. Maybe you even do things for Jesus. But have entrusted your life to Jesus? Is your mindset like that of Paul. Do you see your old life as having been crucified with Christ? The life you now live is entrusted to the One who loved you and gave himself for you.”

Conclusion

So, what do you mean when you say that you have faith in Jesus Christ? Does that word mean what you think it means? Is it consistent with what we see going on in the lives of Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas and Paul? As Tim Keller points out, “all of the insights, comforts, and gifts that God can give us through Christ will come to us through faith.” So, we want to make sure we understand what this faith is. Faith involves embracing certain facts about Jesus. It involves encountering the living Jesus. And, it involves entrusting your life to Jesus. Where do you fit in that definition?