

The Re-Creation Story

John 20:1-18, 1 Corinthians 15, Hebrews 2:14-15, John 3:17, Genesis 1:1-2

Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came into the world to save it, not to condemn it. Sometimes we get that backwards. We think God stands in condemnation of us, but He stands in loving kindness towards us. Today we will see that the empty tomb narrative from John's gospel is a re-creation narrative. God is re-creating the world in Jesus Christ, and He wants to re-create us too.

John 20:1-2 The empty tomb story in John's gospel begins in darkness. Mary Magdalene is going to the tomb "*while it was still dark*" (John 20:1). (Remember, *darkness* in John means both literal and spiritual) Mary arrives at the tomb and finds that the stone had been removed from the entrance. She runs off and finds Peter and John and frantically tells them that someone has taken away Jesus' body and she doesn't know where they put him. Tomb robbery was common in the ancient world. It was reasonable to assume that someone had stolen Jesus' body. However, the burial cloths were still there, placed in an orderly way.

John 20:3-20 Peter and John are alarmed by Mary's report. All they know is that the stone was removed, and the body was taken. They both got up and ran to the tomb, John arriving first. He bent down and peered into the tomb and saw nothing but the strips of linen. Peter catches up and goes straight in. Jesus' body was gone. Only the strips of cloths that had wrapped his body two days before remained. Did the bandits remove the cloths before they stole Jesus' body? John enters the tomb and assesses the situation.

The scripture says, "*He saw and believed*" (20:8). What did he see and believe? Most likely, he "saw" the empty cave and "believed" Mary's story that the body had been taken. The next verse indicates the disciples still did not understand at this point that Jesus had to rise from the dead. So not only had their Lord and teacher been brutally killed by crucifixion, but now his body was gone, stolen. To them the story was over.

Everyone processes grief differently, but as far as we can tell neither Peter nor John offered Mary, who is weeping outside the tomb, any comfort or support. They just walked right past Mary, who was sobbing. They did not see or acknowledge her pain.

John 20:11-18 Mary stays at the tomb, weeping.

In Luke 8:2-3 we learn that Mary had seven evil spirits cast out of her. She was part of a small group of wealthy women who traveled with Jesus and his disciples and "*were helping support them out of their own means.*" So, Mary was one of Jesus' patrons. This means that she had some amount of wealth. Mary probably accrued her modest wealth by owning some business because "Magdala" was a town known for its textiles, fishing, and shipbuilding industries, agriculture, and trade in general. It was a wealthy city.

Still weeping, Mary investigates the tomb and sees two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been. The angels ask: "*Woman, why are you crying?*" Mary is still convinced that a tomb robbery has taken place. "*They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him.*" At that point, Mary turns around and sees someone who she assumes is the gardener. She didn't recognize him, and the fact that the tomb is situated in a garden made her reflexively think this guy must be the gardener. But it wasn't the gardener. It was Jesus. But she did not recognize him. He asks her, "*Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*"

Something Beautiful is Emerging

John is showing us how Jesus' resurrection is a re-creation story. He points back to both the beginning of his gospel and to the beginning of Genesis.

Genesis opens, "*In the beginning...*" (Genesis 1:1). John opens his gospel, "*In the beginning...*" (John 1:1). Genesis says this about the earth: "Darkness was over the surface of the deep" (Genesis 1:2). Today's narrative opens "*While it was still dark,*" Mary went to the tomb (20:1). We have darkness in Genesis, and darkness here in John. Mary standing next to the tomb *in a garden*. The account of Adam and Eve take place *in a garden*. The story of Adam and Eve is one that began with life, but because of sin, ends with death. The story in this garden began with a death ends with resurrection life.

The resurrection of Jesus reverses the curse from Genesis and re-creates the world.

When God removed Adam and Eve from the garden, He placed an angel and a flaming sword in front of the Tree of Life to protect it. When Mary peered into the tomb, she saw angels who announce to her that the resurrected Jesus is the tree of life.

Back to the Story

John 20:15-16 Jesus, mistaken as a gardener, questions Mary about why she is crying. Mary, for the third time, states the body has been taken. Jesus then said to her, “*Mary.*” And instantly, Mary recognized the Risen Lord, her teacher, and her friend! Jesus called her by name! He knows her, He sees her, He loves her!

John 11:43 Jesus called Lazarus by name. When He called him, he came out of the tomb.

Jesus sees you, too. He knows you. And he loves you. He sees you as you really are, not as you pretend to be. He loves you exactly the way you are, but He does not desire for you to stay the way you are. He wants to transform you into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

John 20:17 Jesus tells her to report his resurrection to the disciples. The first garden story ends with them being expelled because of sin and death. The second garden story ends with Mary being *sent out*, on assignment, with good news of life and resurrection.

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The Resurrection Is the Beginning of Re-Creation

2 Corinthians 17-21 and John 3:17 God does not condemn you. He has reconciled you to himself because of Jesus’s death and resurrection. All you need to do is turn from your sins and self-worship and accept the gift reconciliation to God through faith in Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the turning point of history, it’s when God in Christ began re-creating sinners and the world. The promise of Revelation 21:4 and 5 is that for those who receive the reconciliation of God through Christ, He will wipe every tear, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things is now passing away. He is making everything new! His resurrection life and power are available to you, if you want it.

Death Has Been Defeated

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 Jesus, being raised from the dead, means that He has overcome death. Jesus had to endure death — He had to go through it and experience it— in order to overcome it. There was no going around it or avoiding it. He had to go through it. Because He took it on, endured it, and overcame it, Death itself has been defeated.

Hebrews 2:14-15 and 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 Let Jesus be our example. He had to endure death to overcome it. We, too, will one day endure it, but because of Christ, we will overcome it too. We no longer need to live in fear.

1 Corinthians 15:26 One day, death will be destroyed and gone for all eternity. “*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*”

Conclusion

Jesus is alive. He is risen. God is re-creating the world through Him, and God wants to re-create you, too. Jesus sees you. And He calls you by name. There is nothing to fear. Not even death. Let go of the sin and shame seeking to enslave you. Death has been defeated and a new life is offered to you. John 8:36 “*So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”

Do you want this?