The Hope of Easter 2021

John 20

ILLUSTRATION: A man left Chicago for a vacation in Florida.

His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him the next day. When he reached his hotel, he decided to send his wife a quick e-mail.

Unfortunately, he missed 1 letter in the email address and his note was directed instead to an elderly preacher’s wife, whose husband had passed away the day before.

When the grieving widow checked her e-mail, she took 1 look at the monitor, let out a piercing scream, at the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen:   
  
Dearest Wife,   
Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

You’re Loving Husband.   
P.S. It sure is hot down here!  
  
QUESTION: What could be more powerful than news from the other side of death?

Easter is that and more.  
· Not an email message, but a living message.   
· Not from man, but from God.  
· Not from hell, but from heaven.

It’s GOOD NEWS!

Easter Sunday… the day we gather to celebrate that the stone which sealed the life and love of God has been rolled away…our hopes are alive in the resurrection of Jesus!   
God’s Word speaks of this hope as “an anchor for the soul.”

It is often the unspoken strength that allows us to rise each day and face the uncertainties of life.

In the midst of our losses and let downs, we can anchor our souls with divine strength.

The hope of Easter isn’t the hope of a naïve fool or nagging optimist, its hope that meets us in the real world.  
  
John 20:1, 11-18 *“1Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 11Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.13They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” 14At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.15He asked her, “Woman, 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.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).17Jesus said, “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.’”18Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.”*

OUR STORY DOESN’T BEGIN IN THE LIGHT OF DAY…IT BEGINS AT DAWN WHEN IT’S STILL DARK…

Easter begins with an individual…Mary...Perhaps as fascinating and encouraging as anything God chooses to do…He focuses the greatest events…on ordinary individuals.

Mary was not what you’d call your traditionally religious person.

She was from the city of Magdala along the Sea of Galilee (Mary Magdalene) and she may have had a wealthy background…. but nothing could protect her from the harsh realities of the world.

She was a woman in a world that found woman as good scapegoats…somehow more easily separated from God… there was little acceptability to hope on her own.

And as many come to find…the most oppressive powers aren’t just cultural and political; they are personal and spiritual.

Tradition has always had it that Mary Magdalene was a scarlet sinner.

Jesus had come to town and saw into her soul… and cast those powers out… 7 demonic powers.

Jesus did something for her that no one else could ever do, and she could never forget.

No one loved Jesus as much Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus so much that she was the 1st at the tomb.  
  
She comes in love… but ALSO IN DARKNESS; not just the darkness of the sky, but the darkness of her soul.

Her love may have been strong but her hope couldn’t see anything left to hold onto.

Jesus was gone and the world without Him was dark… dark around her … dark within her.

Easter begins where life on this planet finds us…  
· a world not always safe, sane, or satisfying  
· a world where the love of family and friends can fall short

· a world where people we love leave us far too soon

Easter enters such a world…

The love of God is a deep love that seeks us in the darkness.

Not the love of fairy tales or forced devotion… but a love that reaches into the real world.  
  
If you’ve ever found it hard to see that love… you can appreciate Mary.

Easter begins with 1 whose hopes appear sealed in the harsh reality of a tomb.

Even when she arrives and finds the huge stone somehow removed from the cave like tomb… what does she think?

2 things may have entered her mind.

* She may have thought that the Jews had taken away Jesus’s body
* Or there were ghoulish creatures who made it their business to rob tombs

And then a presence beside Mary… a gardener she thought in her grief and tears.

The hope of Easter begins in that place where it’s hard for us to expect much…to see clearly… to recognize God’s presence through our tears and trials… our fears and frustrations.  
  
But the voice of Easter morning would penetrate the darkness.  
  
What Mary saw that Easter morning would change her life forever… and can change ours.

Jesus came to Mary because she needed Him. We all need Him.

Jesus knew than Mary needed a risen savior.

Mary wasn’t to cling to Jesus’ bodily appearance, for the hope that was alive was not in the limited presence of His body, but His unlimited presence.

Jesus unlimited presence would now transcend time and space…. As a living hope for all the world.  
  
What is the living hope that changed Mary’s life? …. That changes our life?

The risen Christ!

Mary discovered the living hope that has the POWER to…  
  
1. Jesus’ resurrection gives hope that He can overcome my past  
  
Mary knew about the powers that can control and define our past…she had been oppressed by them…powers that controlled her.

They were powers bigger than her.

They were the powers over her past.

We all know something of the power over our past… the shame that ties us down from the hope of who we long to be.  
  
ILLUSTRATION: A teacher asked her class what each wanted to become when they grew up…

"President"

"A fireman"

"A teacher"

One by one they answered until it became Billy’s time.

The teacher asked, "Billy, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"Possible," Billy responded.

"Possible?" asked the teacher.

"Yes," Billy said, "my mom is always telling me I’m impossible.

When I grow up, I want to become POSSIBLE."

Mary wanted to be “possible.”

Jesus… the Christ… spoke into her life … with power.

Jesus looked Mary in the eyes, confronted the powers and set her free.

But there was more than just the authority of heaven… there was the LOVE of heaven.   
  
The living hope of Jesus is that we never have to be defined by our past… tied to our failures.

Colossians 2:13b *“God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins.”*   
  
Jesus can give you hope because He overcome my past.  
  
2. Jesus’ resurrection gives hope that He will be present with me…each and every day  
  
“The deepest comfort in life is not in material comforts but in meaningful companionship.”

What comforts us most is to know that we’re not alone.  
  
The hope of Easter is that Jesus can be present with me…each and every day.

Augustine, “You ascended before our eyes. We turned to grieve only to find you in our hearts.”   
  
Jesus said in John 14:18-19 *“18I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”*

This is why Mary couldn’t hold onto the Jesus she saw.

Jesus’ presence wasn’t leaving. It was being let loose.

He wasn’t merely the hope of a woman, but the hope of the world.  
  
You and I never have to feel alone again.

Christ rose so that all who receive Him could have the very presence of Jesus within us… among us.

Hebrews 13:5b *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

Jesus can give you hope because He wants to be with you, each and every day!

3. Jesus’ resurrection gives hope that He has a future for me… to be forever with Him  
  
Jesus knew that death was the final enemy He came to defeat

Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:1-3 *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*  
The hope that changed Mary’s life was that she would be with Jesus forever.  
  
ILLUSTRATION: In Valladolid, Spain, where Christopher Columbus died in 1506, stands a monument commemorating the great discoverer. PICTURE OF STATUE

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the memorial is a statue of a lion destroying 1 of the Latin words that had been part of Spain’s motto for centuries.

Before Columbus made his voyages, the Spaniards thought they had reached the outer limits of earth.

Thus their motto was "Ne Plus Ultra," which means "No More Beyond."

The word being torn away by the lion is "Ne" or "no," make it read "Plus Ultra."

Columbus had proven that there was indeed "more beyond."

The world could never be understood the same.

In the same way, Christ proved there was “more beyond” and life can never be understood the same.  
  
I Peter 1:3-4 *“3Praise 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, 4and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”*

Jesus Christ is our living hope!  
  
“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”

Hebrews 6:19-20a *“19We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.”*

In the resurrection of Jesus, there is an anchor of hope sturdy enough to withstand anything.

This hope is the anchor that declares…

· Jesus can overcome my past  
· Jesus can be with in the present… each and every day  
· Jesus has a future for me… to be with Him forever  
  
ILLUSTRATION: Murdo Ewen MacDonald, a prisoner of war in Germany and chaplain to American soldiers, told how he learned of the Normandy invasion.

Early on D-Day, he was awakened and told that a Scotsman in the British prisoner-of-war camp wanted to see him.

MacDonald ran to the barbed wire that separated the 2 camps.

The Scot, who was in touch with the BBC by underground radio, spoke 2 words in Gaelic, meaning "They have come."

MacDonald ran back to the American camp and spread the news: "They have come . . . They have come."

And everyone knew the allied troops had landed at Normandy.

The reaction was incredible. Men jumped and shouted, hugged each other, even rolled on the ground. Outwardly they were still captives, but inwardly they were free.

That’s the hope that changes life!  
  
The risen Jesus would simply ask this question: Are we living to die or dying to live?

Jesus said in Mark 8:34-36 *“34Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For whoever wants to save their lifewill lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”*

If we want to follow Jesus into life…He invites us to come enter His death.

Eternal life with Jesus does not come as an earnings program… or an enhancement program… it’s an exchange program.

If we offer our life to Christ, we will receive His life within us.