

John 20:1-16

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!”

On February, 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, Ruth Dillow received the message from the military mothers fear the most. It stated that her son, Clayton Carpenter, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait and died. Ruth Dillow later wrote, “I can’t begin to describe my grief and shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger and loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great.” Every parent who has lost a child can relate to her grief, but 3 days after Ruth Dillow received that message, the telephone rang. The voice on the other end said, “Mom, it’s me. I’m alive.”

Ruth Dillow said, “I couldn’t believe it at first, but then I recognized his voice.” Ruth’s son was alive. The earlier message she had received was a mistake! She said, “I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels, why, because my son whom I had thought was dead, was . . . alive . . .” Ruth Dillow, the son you thought was dead is alive.ⁱ Shh! Don’t tell anyone.

That was the clear reaction of Jesus’ disciples and closest friends that first Easter day. In **Luke 24:5-7** we read that Jesus’ disciples were distraught after His crucifixion. Early on Sunday morning, some of the women took spices to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the mouth of

tomb. When they went inside Christ's body was not there. Suddenly two men in gleaming white clothes stood beside them. The women bowed down their faces with fright, but the men said to them, "*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.*" Then they remembered Jesus' words. When the women came back from the tomb, they told the disciples what had happened, but none of the men believe them. Their words seemed like utter nonsense.

John, in his telling of the story, focuses on Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene. Mary comes to the tomb and sees that the stone has been rolled away. So she runs to Simon Peter and another disciple, and says in **verse 2**, "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!*" Evidently the thought had not occurred to Mary that Jesus could be resurrected from the grave. See, Mary like the rest of the disciples, followed Jesus ... heard Jesus ... but did not really believe Jesus.

Peter and the other disciple start for the tomb. When they, too, find it empty, what do they do? Did they jump up and down with excitement? Did they believe? No! They simply went back to the house where they were staying. There was no celebration, no cries of, “He’s alive. He’s alive.” You might expect those who knew Jesus best would be bubbling over with excitement that first Easter Sunday morning, because He had been delivered from the tomb, just as He said. Instead, they were totally mystified that His body was gone. They didn’t really expect Him to be alive any more than Ruth Dillow expected her son to be alive. And they kept it quiet; shh!

As for Mary, she stands outside the tomb crying. She bends over to look into the tomb and sees two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. In **verse 13** we read where they ask her, “*Woman, why are you crying? Who do you seek?*” She says, “*They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.*” Then in **verse 15**, she turns around and sees Jesus standing there in front of her, but she still doesn’t recognize Him. “*Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?*” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she says, “*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him,*

and I will get him." Jesus then calls her name, "*Mary.*" Not until He calls her name "*Mary.*" She then turns toward Him and cries out in Aramaic, "*Rabboni!*" (which means "Teacher"). Surprise, Mary! Surprise! Your Lord is alive. Surprise, Peter. Surprise, who-ever. Surprise, to all those who thought Jesus was dead. Surprise, world, Jesus is alive! But shh! Keep it quiet.

The story of Easter is no carefully contrived story designed by Jesus' followers to convince us and the world of something that isn't so. The story of Easter is the honest reporting of baffled believers who had no idea where Jesus was leading them until He appeared to them beyond the grave. Easter is such an extraordinary day. No wonder people gather in such numbers all over the world to celebrate the event of the resurrection. Jesus Christ who was dead is alive! But yet most keep it quiet, most remain silent, remember shh!

Chuck Colson, in his book *The Good Life*, tells us of one man who believed strongly in Christ's resurrection. His name was Edward Bennett Williams. Williams, now deceased, was one of the great lawyers and Washington power brokers of our age, an extraordinarily gifted man, says

Colson. “For one full generation, he was the man to go to if your life was on the line. His client list reads like a who’s who of American celebrities over a 30 or 40 year period, starting with Joe McCarthy and Jimmy Hoffa, through Frank Sinatra, and a series of senators and other high government officials.

“Although Williams was quiet about it,” says Colson, “he was a deeply religious man, a daily communicant in the Roman Catholic Church. He fought a long and valiant fight against cancer. As he struggled on his deathbed and as it became clear that he was losing the battle, his son showed him an article that named him one of the most powerful men in Washington. The Washington Post, for whom Williams was counsel, wrote that and he ‘waved the magazine away.’ He then said, ‘they don’t realize what power really is . . . I’m about to see true power. Fighting death is selfish on my part. It’s time for me to let go and see what real power is.’ Williams died peace-fully,” notes Colson, “as unshakable in his conviction about the resurrection as he had ever been in the cases he argued in court.”ⁱⁱ

Christ is alive. In **1 Corinthians 15:3-7** the Apostle Paul wrote, “*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised*

on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles . . .”

Did you catch that? Paul was telling about a shared experience of the Christian community. The risen Christ had appeared to more than five hundred believers, most of whom were still alive when Paul was writing. All it would have taken to shake Paul’s witness would have been one of those 500 who had encountered the risen Christ to refute his testimony, but none of them did. To their minds, there was no doubt. Christ is alive. Nothing in the ancient world refutes that testimony. The tomb was empty. The body was missing. Even more importantly, hundreds of lives were changed by the appearance of Jesus after his death. And Paul was not about to remain quiet.

Nothing in the ancient world refutes that testimony. Nothing in the modern world refutes that testimony either. It always has been fashionable in some circles to doubt Christ’s resurrection.

The critical mind cannot accept what it cannot prove. And yet we are not always so resistant to alternative ideas. We accept many things that cannot yet be proved, but yet even today many still remain quiet.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picassos to Raphaels to Rembrandt's. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war, and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son. About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art. The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really that great an artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. “Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It’s a gift, my gift to you.”

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected. The man died months later. There was to be a great auction of all his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase maybe one of them for their collection. On the platform sat the first painting to be auctioned, the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. “We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?” There was dead silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted. “We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one,” but the auctioneer persisted. “Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?” Another voice shouted angrily. “We didn’t come to

see this painting ... We came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandt's. Get on with the real paintings!" But still the auctioneer continued. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?" Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, he could afford much more. "We have \$10, who will bid \$20?" "Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters." "\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?" The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, going twice, SOLD for \$10!" A man sitting on the second row shouted. "Now let's get on with the real collection!" The auctioneer laid down his gavel and said, "The auction is over." "What about the paintings?" "I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time.

Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

God gave His son 2,000 years ago to die on a cruel cross for you and me. Much like the auctioneer, His message to all of us today is, “The son, the son, who’ll take the son?” Because you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything. Think Jesus the Christ does not exist? Surprise! Jesus does exist, do you believe? If you do then don’t continue to keep it quiet, let the world know “He’s Alive! If not, if you don’t truly believe let me ask you “Who are you looking for?” Jesus is alive, and you believe that then don’t keep it a secret. We are not to go SHH! We are to tell the world Jesus is Alive!

ⁱ Melvin M. Newland, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/easter-what-a-difference-Melvin-Newland-sermon-on-Easter-resurrection>.

ⁱⁱ Edward Bennett Williams, quoted in Christopher Buckley, “The Case for Edward Bennett Williams,” Washington Post, November 3, 1991, X1. (Wharton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005, pp. 341-342).