

## The Great Discovery (John 20:1-10)

In this writing of John's Gospel, his first mention of anyone is Mary Magdalene. So, let me start there. She is a character that most of us do not know a lot about.

Early on the first Easter morning, when Mary Magdalene awoke, she felt the terrible shock we do when the death of someone close is so fresh that we have to realize it again, to tell ourselves the bad news and to make ourselves believe. I still do this with the passing of Pastor Stu Merkel from Faith Community Church, my previous church. Stu died on June 27 of last year.

Some people respond to grief this way, determined to keep going. Do the tasks of daily life. Fold the towels. Load the dishwasher. We get up and move because we must, because we fear that if we do not, we may never move again. We get up and do something, because anything is better than nothing.

## The Great Discovery

page 2 of 9

Mary Magdalene got up and went to the tomb. She went there because she was a disciple. She may not appear on lists of the twelve—all men—but she appears in each of the four Gospels, in combination with various other women, and in John's Gospel, all alone. Every version of the story tells that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb, early on the first day of the week. In John's Gospel, she is the first witness that Jesus' body is not there. She carried the message to the disciples, convincing them that they needed to come and see what had happened.

When they left the tomb, Mary stayed and wept, and then she saw angels—again, the number and description vary among the Gospels, but she always meets the transcendent delegation. Then she saw a man and spoke to him, “supposing him to be the gardener.” He spoke to her, asking why she wept, but he had to do more than speak for her to recognize him. When he said her name, she knew her Lord.

## The Great Discovery

page 3 of 9

Do we wonder why Jesus chose to speak to Mary Magdalene? He knew her faithful heart and trusted her above the other disciples to believe the impossible and to understand his meaning. She reached out to him, but when he told her, “Do not hold onto me,” she did not argue.

They met at an in-between moment, when night touched day. He was between two states, and so was she. The Jesus of Friday had died, and the Christ of heaven had not yet ascended. Mary Magdalene, the grieving follower, had only a moment to kneel before him, a moment to be transformed into Mary Magdalene, the first evangelist. He knew how well-equipped she was to spread the word, determined, and convincing and faithful.

“I have seen the Lord,” she told the disciples, and she told others, and they told others, and so until one day someone told us. It may be good news we

have always known, told so long ago we cannot remember

The Great Discovery  
page 4 of 9

when, or it may have come as a gift when we needed it desperately, a word of hope at the end of a long night. It is our work now, to let the world know. Christ is risen. Spread the word.

When we study John's account, it must be remembered that John was writing an historical account. He was not interested in giving insurmountable evidence for the resurrection. His interest was twofold: (1) to give the evidence that led him to immediately understand and believe, and (2) to give enough evidence to lead anyone to immediate belief—if a person is willing to believe. He was interested in giving enough evidence to make anyone's faith viable and respectable. Now having said this, John's record of Jesus' resurrection is a strong historical account of the event. To an honest, objective, and good heart, the evidence is convincing.

## The Great Discovery

page 5 of 9

The fact that morality is the point of John's gospel eliminates any possibility of his fabricating a lie, especially a lie of such immoral proportions.

The description of so many little details, details that are so human, says that the phenomenal event is an event that actually took place. Such human-like details could never be built around an event whose main point was a fable. For instance, Peter and John's running and John's outrunning Peter; Mary's human response of frantic bewilderment; the young author's believing without physical fact and admitting that his belief was not based upon an understanding of Scripture. There are, of course, many other examples that point to the event actually taking place.

The head wrapping is strong evidence for the resurrection. Only the head piece is actually said to

be folded up by itself. The other pieces are assumed to be still folded up because of the phrase “separate from the linen.” Although the phrase substantially

The Great Discovery

page 6 of 9

supports the assumption, it is only an assumption. The point is this: if John or any other author was fabricating a case for such a phenomenal event as the resurrection, he would state explicitly that the body wrappings along with the head wrappings were still folded up—building evidence upon evidence.

The changed lives of the Lord’s disciples are indisputable evidence. It is psychological evidence. From seemingly *irreversible despondency* and from *being hunted down* like insurrectionist dogs, they became new creatures of enthusiasm and motivation. They were propelled by a dynamic power and bold courage. Within 30 days they were seen proclaiming a risen Christ from the very spot where their lives were being threatened. They were preaching to the very people who we seeking to

arrest and execute them. Only one thing could cause them to adopt this strategy: the Lord had indeed risen, and he had implanted within them a new power never before experienced by man.

The Great Discovery

page 7 of 9

In discussing evidences, we must remember that God *through inspiration* has not formulated the Scripture to prove anything. God proclaims in Scripture that he *is*, in other words (that he exists), that he is love, and that he has shown his love supremely by sending his own Son to save a lost and dying world. What God wants from us is love and belief, love for the Lord Jesus and belief in the supreme power of a loving God. This is the point of the resurrection account. We are to believe because we love even as Mary and John loved.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading from John?



approach you in the “dark” of our own despair or confusion. We thank you for the evidence of the empty tomb and the folded linen cloths, which proclaim your victory and order. Give us the grace to move from confusion to conviction, and to believe in your risen power even when we do not fully understand the path ahead. Strengthen our faith to

The Great Discovery

page

9 of 9

look past the immediate, earthly, or painful circumstances of our lives and to trust the joy of your eternal life. Help us to, like the beloved disciple, “see and believe” in your living presence and to share this message of hope with a world in need of your light. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**