

Seeing Jesus

Easter Sunday | John 20:1–2, 11–16

BibleWay Sermon Alignment

Across this series, we have watched crowds and disciples and onlookers all try to see Jesus and miss him. The crowd in John 12 wanted his miracles. The religious leaders wanted him gone. Even his closest disciples kept missing the point. And then, after the crucifixion, Jesus does something striking—he hides. From John 12 all the way to John 20, he disappears. Even after the resurrection, he keeps hiding. He walks with disciples on the road and they don't recognize him. He stands in front of his closest friends and they don't see him. But there is one person he reveals himself to first. Her name is Mary Magdalene. And the question Easter morning puts to us is the same question her story answers: why her? Why does Jesus make himself known to Mary when so many others can't see him?

1. Devotion in the Dark

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." — John 20:1

In the ancient Near East, the tomb of someone who mattered should have been packed. If Jesus had as many followers as the Gospels suggest, that space should have been bursting at the seams the first morning it could be visited. Instead, it's a handful of women. Almost everyone else has scattered. The disciples are hiding. The crowds have moved on. And in that emptiness, Mary shows up—before the sun is up, at the first possible moment after the Sabbath.

Then she does something that, in the Roman world, could get a person killed. She calls him *Lord*. Caesar is Lord. Yahweh is Lord. Jesus is not Lord—especially not a dead Jesus. To say it out loud was dangerous. To say it about a man whose body was now in a borrowed grave bordered on delusional. But Mary doesn't care. Whether Jesus is alive or dead, he is Lord to her. That is what devotion looks like—devotion that doesn't need anything in return, devotion that shows up in the dark when there is nothing left to gain.

Most of us know how to be devoted to something that does something for us. We saw that during Covid—people climbing staircases for hours, jumping in cold lakes, walking laps in their yards, anything to feel a sense of control or purpose. Devotion to a thing that gives something back is normal. Mary is devoted to a dead man who can give her nothing. And that is the first clue to why Jesus shows himself to her.

Discussion Questions

1. Compare Mary in John 20:1–2 with the disciples in John 20:19, hiding behind locked doors. Same Jesus, same resurrection morning, two very different responses. Before getting to the contrast, share with the group: who in your own life has shown you what quiet, costly devotion to Jesus actually looks like? A parent, a grandparent, a Sunday school teacher, a friend. What did you see in them that made an impression?
2. In Luke 8:2, we learn Mary had been delivered from seven demons—she had every reason to feel disqualified, and instead she became the most devoted person at the tomb. Read Revelation 2:4 together: "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at

first." As a group, think back to seasons when your love for Jesus felt fresh. What was different about those seasons? What was your prayer life like, what were you reading, what was on your mind? See if any common threads show up across your stories.

2. The Weeping That Reveals the Heart

"But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb... They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'" — John 20:11–13

In just three verses, John uses the word weeping or wept four times. That is not accidental. He is hammering it. He wants you to feel it. Mary is not crying the way you cry over a sad story or a hard headline. She is weeping the way a person weeps when someone they love is gone.

You and I do not weep for strangers. If a neighbor down the street has to foreclose on their home, we feel bad. If an acquaintance has to drop out of school, we are sorry to hear it. But we do not weep. Weeping is reserved for the people we are bound to—the ones whose absence leaves a hole in us. And that is what Mary feels. The grief is so deep that even his body being gone is unbearable to her.

Notice what is driving her: she just wants to be near him. *"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."* She is not looking for theology. She is not looking for an explanation. She is not even looking for a resurrection—that is not on her mind yet. She is looking for *him*. Even just his body. Even just to be close. As a pastor, I have stood with grieving spouses and children at funerals, and there is something almost universal: people want to walk up to the body, lean in, say one more thing. We could correct them theologically and tell them the person isn't really there. But we don't. Because that pull toward the one you love—that ache to close the distance—has a name. It is called love.

Discussion Questions

1. In John 11:35, Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. In John 20:11–15, Mary weeps at the tomb of Jesus. Read Psalm 42:1–2 together: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." Take a moment as a group and share—when in your life have you felt something like that longing for God? It might have been a mountain top moment, a hard season, a quiet morning, a worship service. What stirred it up?
2. Jesus says in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." There is a kind of mourning in the Christian life that is actually holy—a tender ache for closeness with Jesus. Mary felt it deeply at the tomb. What do you think that kind of holy mourning looks like in everyday life—for a working parent, a college student, a retiree? How might it show up differently in different seasons of life?

3. Whom Are You Seeking?

"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?'... Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)." — John 20:15–16

Jesus asks Mary two questions. The first is the one the angels already asked: why are you weeping? But the second is new, and it is the question this whole series has been building toward: whom are you

seeking? The Jews were seeking a political leader. The Greeks were seeking a wise man and a miracle worker. Jesus had to hide from all of them, because none of them were actually seeking him.

And here is what is striking about Mary's answer—she doesn't answer. She just keeps obsessing about his body. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." She doesn't want a political leader. She doesn't want a miracle worker. She doesn't even want an explanation. She just wants Jesus. And the moment her whole heart is exposed, the moment it is clear there is nothing else she is after, he says her name. And she sees him.

This is not a random reveal. Earlier in John, Jesus said it plainly: *"He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21). Manifest. Make myself known. If you are struggling to see Jesus—if you have been a Christian for years and you keep catching glimpses but never the face—this is the answer he gives. You want to see him? Love him.

This is why the greatest commandment starts where it starts: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We want it to start somewhere else. We want it to be transactional, or logical, or programmatic—something we can think our way through or earn our way into. Because love is hard. Love is selfless. Love means giving him our attention, our devotion, our actual lives. But that is the door. Mary loved him, and he showed himself to her first. The invitation of Easter is not just to remember that Jesus loves you. It is to love him back.

Discussion Questions

1. Read these three verses together: John 14:21 ("he who loves me... I will manifest myself to him"), Matthew 22:37–38 (the greatest commandment), and 1 John 4:19 ("We love because he first loved us"). Share with the group: when has Jesus felt most real and present to you? What was happening in your heart and life at the time? See if you notice any common threads as different people share their stories.
2. In Philippians 3:8, Paul writes, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Not knowing about him—knowing him. Mary in John 20 lives that verse before Paul ever writes it. As a group, brainstorm together: what are some small, ordinary, gentle ways someone could simply love Jesus this week—not perform for him, not earn anything from him, just love him? Try to come up with practices that would fit naturally into the rhythms of daily life.

Mary did not see Jesus because she was the smartest, or the bravest, or the most theologically prepared. She saw him because she loved him. And the risen Christ still makes himself known to those who do.