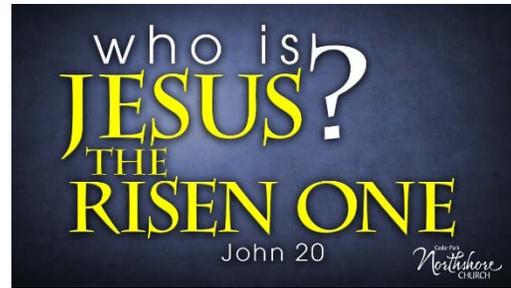


Over the past several months, we have been walking through the Gospel of John, answering life's most important question: Who is Jesus?



Today we are in John 20. What a great day to ask this vitally important question: Who is Jesus? This is a big day. If we're church-goers at all, we typically make a point of being in church on this important day; folk are a bit more likely to respond to an invitation to attend church on this special day... so if you're in that category of visitor today, welcome! We're glad you are here.

There are Easter celebrations all around. I hope you are like us and have a plan to celebrate with family and a feast.

But what are we really celebrating today? Is it the bunnies and eggs and such... the unofficial arrival of Spring... the ham and coconut cream pies? All that is great! But I hope that everyone knows that we celebrate Easter because of Jesus. It is Resurrection Sunday. **He is Risen!**

This the climax of our most important week as Christians. Our culture makes a *bigger deal* out of Christmas, but Holy Week, ending in Resurrection Sunday, is far more significant. It is truly wonderful that a Baby was born, but it is stunning that a Savior died... paying the penalty for our sin. It is remarkable that Emmanuel, God with us, took on the frailty of human flesh, but it is astonishing that Christ Jesus conquered death forever with resurrection power. It may even be easier to celebrate a baby at Christmas, especially if we merely think of Jesus as a good person, a fine teacher, and maybe even a myth... but truly celebrating today makes greater demands on us. Today we are called to believe in eternity, and resurrection power... and we are also called to believe that **we needed** such resurrection power, that our sin could only be erased by this suffering Savior and our everlasting life could only be guaranteed by this Conqueror of Death.

So this may be the best day to answer the question again: Who is Jesus? And we do so by turning to the account of that Resurrection Day in the Gospel of John, chapter 20.

Let's stand and read the first several verses together

Early 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. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)¹

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Mary Magdalene went to the tomb
and saw that the stone had been removed
from the entrance.
So she came running to Simon Peter
and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved,
and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,
and we don't know where they have put him!"

John 20:1,2



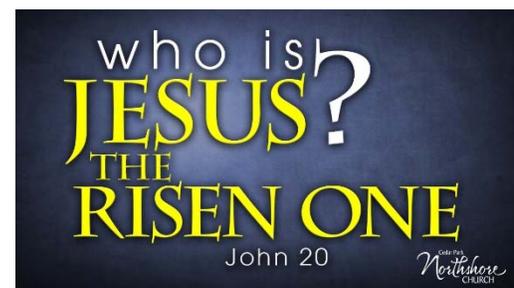
So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
Both were running, but the other disciple
outrun Peter and reached the tomb first.
He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there
but did not go in.
Then Simon Peter came along behind him
and went straight into the tomb.
He saw the strips of linen lying there,
as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head.
The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.
Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first,
also went inside. He saw and believed.
(They still did not understand from Scripture
that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

John 20:3-9



If we were looking for one key word for all of the Gospel of John (other than the word **Jesus**) I think that word would be believe. It is certainly a prominent word in John 20, and we see it before us in verse 8. John, referring to himself (John is that other disciple) says "He saw and believed."

That is the point of asking the question: **Who is Jesus?** We are not merely looking for data about Jesus (although it is good to know a lot about Jesus). As we have walked chapter by chapter finding that Jesus is the Word, and the Son, and the Savior *and*



¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 20:1-9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

such, this isn't merely more knowledge for our database. As Jesus is revealed to us in these ways the *end sought* is not that we merely *know about* Jesus, it is that we **know** Jesus. That means that we believe.

This is the Good News of the Gospel, that God loves us, and sent His Son to redeem us, so that we can enjoy relationship with Him now and for all eternity.

It might be most plainly put in John 3:

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever **believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever **believes** in him is not condemned²...

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him.
Whoever believes in him is not condemned,
but whoever does not believe stands condemned already
because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.
This is the verdict: Light has come into the world,
but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.
Everyone who does evil hates the light,
and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.
But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light,
so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done
has been done in the sight of God.
John 3:16-18



The aim of the Gospel of John is that we would believe. The plan of God is that we would believe. And we certainly see believing, from a number of different perspectives, in John 20.

Like I said a moment ago, in verse 8 it says that John saw and believed; clearly both in the tomb that morning, Peter and John, saw and believed. And then verse 9 says:

They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.³

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
Both were running, but the other disciple
outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there
but did not go in.
Then Simon Peter came along behind him
and went straight into the tomb.
He saw the strips of linen lying there,
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The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.
Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first,
also went inside. He saw and believed.
(They still did not understand from Scripture
that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)
John 20:3-9



Think of that, Peter and John, ones who were closest to Jesus, not merely part of the 12 Disciples, but member of the executive committee (the inner circle)... while believing, they still not yet completely understand.

That can be an important lesson for us. Believing doesn't always include a thorough understanding. If we wait to have everything *figured out* before we believe, we may never believe.

² The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 3:16–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 20:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I know those who are holding off on believing Jesus until they understand more. I'm all for understanding more, but understanding is not a prerequisite for belief.



In what other area of life do we apply this standard. I've always believed in gravity. Babies believe in gravity; they fall down all the time. But it wasn't until 11th grade physics that I understood that acceleration due to gravity occurs at a rate of 9.8 meters-per-second squared. And I suppose I know a little more about gravity today... and I know that there is a whole lot I don't know about gravity. But I still believe.

Let's not let a lack of understanding keep us from believing Jesus. I want to understand more and more every day, and my life is devoted to helping people like us understand more about Jesus... but we don't need to have it all figured out to believe.

Verse 11 begins another picture of one believing.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They 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." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He 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."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus 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.' "

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!"⁴

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.
As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.
They 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."
At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.
He 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."
Jesus said to her, "Mary."
She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").
Jesus 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.' "
Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!"
John 20:11-18

Northshore
CHURCH

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 20:11-18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Mary Magdalene believed. There are lessons from her story of belief too. She came that day distracted by her own tasks and assumptions. She came with a job to do, a sacred job of caring for the body of Jesus. Other passages explain that she and other women were prepared to embalm the body of Jesus. When she found the tomb open and the body gone, she assumed that the body had been moved, possibly stolen. And then when Jesus first revealed Himself to her, she was so filled with grief and worry, her vision so blurred by tears, that she didn't even see Jesus.

We can't let our own agendas, our concerns, even our pain and grief keep us from believing.

I know people who are putting off believing until things aren't so *messed up*. They have work to do or problems to figure out.

Things are too wrong to believe right now. Yet, it seems that the answer to the problems and the mess can only be found in believing.

I don't judge... mostly because I am so often guilty of the very same thing... so occupied by the task, so crushed by the responsibility, so confident that I can untangle the mess or solve the puzzle, that I fail to see Jesus standing in the midst of the mess, calling out my name, offering the answer.

The next to believe are His Disciples:

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.



On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

John 20:19-23

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It was Resurrection Sunday night (the Disciples went to church on Sunday night). It wasn't exactly church; they were hiding out. It doesn't take much imagination to assume that they thought they were next. Would crucifixion of merely Jesus suffice? Would His Disciples be next? But instead of an armed detachment of soldiers breaking down the door, Jesus appeared. And they believed.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

This reveals another remarkable aspect of believing Jesus. How did this band of cowards transform into the founders of the Church? How did it go from these weaklings who huddled together wondering if they were next, to the Church that has literally changed the world with billions of followers?

The difference is clear. They received the Holy Spirit. At that moment they went from knowing about the power of God, to possessing the power of God. The Holy Spirit of God took residence in those first believers that day, and it changed everything.

That same Holy Spirit is alive and active... drawing believers to Jesus today. You may not understand it, you may be distracted with all sorts of other things, but you have a sense that believing Jesus is right. Friend we are here for a reason and purpose today, and the Spirit confirms that in our own hearts.

Then there is this last verse that might even seem a bit confusing; in verse 23 Jesus said:

²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” ⁵

The point here is **the forgiveness of sins**. If we think that Jesus was giving mere men the power to forgive sins, we would be taking this out of the context of the Gospel. The point is that Jesus sends His followers with the message of the Gospel. And the Good News is this: there is forgiveness of sins. When we believe, our sins are forgiven. When we believe Jesus, the penalty He paid for sin is credited to our account.

⁵ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Jn 20:19–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

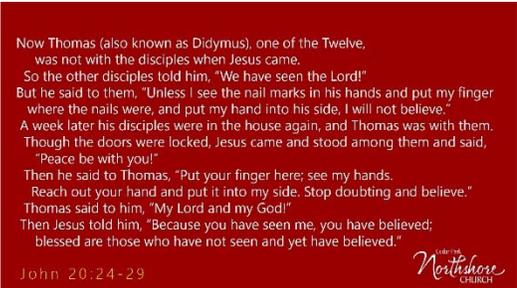
We can't let our sin keep us from believing. We can't somehow think that we are too far gone, or even that we need to clean up our act before we believe. The Good News of the Gospel is that there is forgiveness of sin... the sin of all of us, and all the sin of each of us.



And then, finally in John 20, there is Thomas:

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”



Thomas, some call him Doubting Thomas. I wonder who started that *name calling*. Was it those other Disciples? Because if it was, that is totally unfair. They got to see Jesus. Just a few verses back it says that Jesus “showed them his hands and side⁶”. Thomas merely wanted what they had, an eye-witness account. And that is what he got.

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Thomas believed. There is nothing wrong with looking for evidence. Do the research. See if this faith holds up to scrutiny. Now we likely won't have an opportunity like Thomas had, to actually examine the wounds on the body of Jesus.

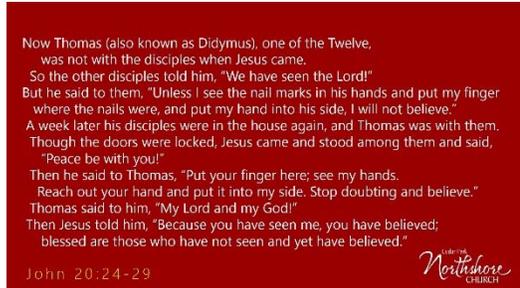


⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 20:20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But we do have the opportunity to examine the Body of Christ in this way; look at the people of faith. The New Testament often describes the people of God, the Church, as the Body of Christ. Take a look. See how we heal. See how we deal with adversity. See how we help and love and serve. Now it won't be like looking at the beautiful, perfect body of Jesus. We're mere mortals and we fail. But on the whole, look at the Church, the Body of Christ, and draw the inevitable conclusions. Believe.

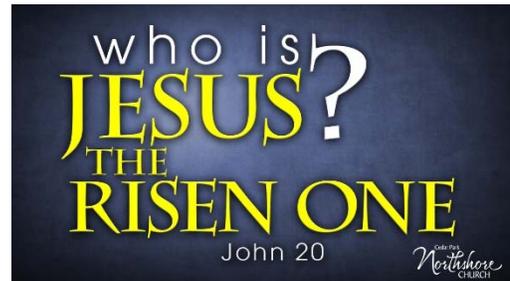
We believe and you can too... just as Jesus promised Thomas.

²⁹ Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."⁷



Thomas could see Jesus in the flesh (the Resurrected flesh)... but many, many more would believe... people like us and the billions of others.

So today is a day to believe. On this Resurrection Sunday we call for belief. For those who have been at this a long time, we believe again... we believe in Jesus, the Risen One, the Conqueror of Death. We turn from our sin and doubt and failings, and we receive God's mercy and grace as we believe again in Jesus our refuge and strength.



And on this special day, we call those who are far off to believe. Maybe you are one who believed once, but find yourself far off. Make today your day and believe. Believe that God loves us, and sent His Son to redeem us, so that we can enjoy relationship with Him now and for all eternity.



⁷ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 20:24–29). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Maybe, just maybe, you are one who has never really believed... but you find yourself here today; that is no accident. You can believe today.

- Regardless of whether you understand it all or not
- In spite of your agenda or distractions
- Allowing the Holy Spirit to draw you closer to God
- Confessing sin and now knowing that there is forgiveness of sin
- Bringing questions and doubts, yet believing

I have a plan today. **We have a song that we're going to sing.**

I'm going to pray in a moment, leading us all in prayer. And then we're going to sing. It is a song about believing.

Maybe you've been in a service like this and there have been steps to take. A form to fill out or a prayer to pray. Maybe you've seen someone walk to the front to talk and pray with a pastor. All of that is good (you can do that if you want).

But today you can simply declare these words in this song. Make this song your prayer and your new story.

It says "I believe in the Son, I believe in the Risen One."

We'll sing "Amen and Amen" which simply says let it be so. We agree!

We'll sing "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow... I know He holds my life, my future in His hand." We can all leave here, knowing Jesus... for the first time, a renewed time, and maybe just a bit more.

This can be your declaration today.

As we are ready to pray, let's bow for a moment. I promise that I won't do anything to embarrass you, but I wonder if you are one who intends to make that declaration today, believing in Jesus. Would you let me know, trusting me to pray with you.

Father, what a glorious day when we celebrate Jesus the Risen One! We turn to you, believing Jesus, receiving your Holy Spirit, as well as Your great mercy and grace. We believe Jesus, and we pray in His great name.