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Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“NEW FAITH (PART 1)”
John 20:1-18

☠ On Friday, the old faith of Jesus’ followers collided with his cross and fell lifeless to the ground.

Their conviction that their Master would reestablish the Kingdom of Israel proved false. Beset by confusion and doubt, they did not know what to believe.

☀ On Sunday, a new faith burst into life among Christ’s Followers!

They knew He had conquered death, and they began to see that the Kingdom is far greater than they imagined.

An old faith died Good Friday afternoon. A new and better faith came to life Easter Sunday morning!

☀ Today, God the Father, Son, and HS is inviting us to shed whatever remnants of the old religious faith we are clinging to and embrace his new resurrection faith.

The Apostle John’s account of Easter morning is recorded in John 20:1-18 {p 1,106}. There are two scenes.

☐ Scene 1 (vv 1-10) describes the discovery of the empty tomb.

Two days ago Jesus died on the cross. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took down the body. They embalmed it with myrrh and aloes, bound it with strips of linen, and laid it in the tomb. After rolling a large stone in front of the door, they left.

Yesterday was the Sabbath. In keeping with the purity laws, no one had any contact with the corpse.

At last it is Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene hurries the tomb **“while it [is] still dark.”** Drawing near she sees that the stone has been moved, turns around, and runs

back. **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,”** she gasps, **“and we don’t know where they have put him.”**

Peter and John run to the tomb. John arrives first and peers into the emptiness. Peter catches up, pushes him aside, and goes into the tomb. The linens and head wrap are there, empty but intact, as though the body evaporated right through them.

Finally, John comes inside. He, too, scrutinizes the evidence and believes that the Messiah who died has risen from the dead.

Peter and John respond with joy, awe, shock and perplexity. This is not what they were expecting! Uncertain what comes next, the subdued disciples make their way back to the city in a daze.

☐ Scene 2 (vv 11-18) reports on Jesus’ appearance to Mary Magdalene.

Looking into the tomb she sees **“angels... seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.”** Blinded by tears, she neither perceives the significance of the empty grave clothes nor identifies the figures as angels.

They speak: **“Woman, why are you crying?”**
“They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.” *Put his dead body,* she means. Turning around, Mary nearly runs into the Resurrected Christ.

“Woman, why are you crying?” He asks.
“Who is it you are looking for?”

“Sir,” she sobs, **“if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”**

“Mary,” Jesus says. Now she recognizes him! Having lost the Messiah once already, she is not about to go through that again. Mary exuberantly throws herself on Jesus.

He responds: **“Do not hold on to me... Go instead to my brothers”** (the surviving 11 disciples) **“and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and our Father, to my God and your God.’”** So Mary returns to the other disciples with the Good News: **“I have seen the Lord!”**

An old faith died on Friday. A new and better faith came to life on Sunday! What does John’s account reveal about this fresh faith?

◆ 1st, Resurrection Faith must be experienced to be grasped.

Months before his death and resurrection Christ

[begins] **to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life** (Mt 16:21).

After the Transfiguration Jesus cautions those who witnessed it, **“Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”** (Mt 17:9).

Just before Palm Sunday Jesus says,

“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!” (Mt 20:18-29).

How do the disciples respond when Jesus foretells his death and resurrection? They angrily rebuke him. They get caught up in irrelevant questions. They jockey for power and prestige in the coming kingdom. They are oblivious to God’s great plan of salvation!

Only when Peter and John see the empty linens do they begin to believe. Only when Mary sees the risen Christ does she begin to believe. Resurrection faith is experiential.

☀ God is inviting us to embrace resurrection faith first-hand!

◆ 2nd, Resurrection Faith is grounded in relationship.

△ There is our vertical connection with Jesus. To be sure, resurrection faith includes a set of essential truths that are conveyed by Scripture; yet, that knowledge remains cold and inanimate until it is brought to life in our ongoing dealings with the Jesus of Easter.

△ But resurrection faith also involves our horizontal connection with other disciples who also know Christ. John’s focus in chs 20-21 is not on the mechanics of the miracle, the angels, or the response of Christ’s enemies; here (and to a lesser degree in Mt, Mk and Lk) it is on the believers’ interaction with Jesus *and each other*.

Why? We need our brothers and sisters!

Faith in Jesus practiced in isolation is a contradiction in terms. Not only so it is disappointing, since it always ends up being stunted, lop-sided, and incomplete. But it can fulfill its promise in community. In the context of real fellowship it can become healthy, balanced, and whole. Resurrection faith is relational.

☀ God is inviting us to resurrection faith through relationship with Christ and each other!

◆ 3rd, Resurrection Faith advances the Kingdom of God.

What does Jesus tell Mary to do in verse 17?

“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.'"

The Lord won't ascend for another 40 days. Until then, He will freely allow (even invite) others to touch him. So why does He give this instruction?

Consider the Ascension itself. Before He vanishes, Jesus will make 3 huge statements:

1) "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). God the Father has already crowned the Son King; hence, the Kingdom is already being established (though it has not yet come in all its fullness).

2) "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). He is calling us to serve his Kingdom by helping make disciples who bring his life to the world. **"And,"**

3) "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Jesus is present and active through his Holy Spirit, his people, and his Word.

It is essential that Mary let go of her old faith and advance the Kingdom. That is why He commissions her to go and bring the Good News to the rest of the disciples.

☀ Likewise, God is inviting us to participate in resurrection faith by serving his Kingdom!

One faith died on Good Friday. Another faith – new and better -- burst into life on Easter.

This resurrection faith must be experienced to be grasped. It is grounded in relationship with Jesus and his followers, and it advances the Kingdom of God!

Dear friends, let us not get stuck in that old faith that died on Good Friday. By the grace of God, at his invitation and by his power, we can participate in Christ's resurrection faith, now and forever!