

SEEING JESUS IN JOHN

WEEK FORTY-SEVEN: JESUS APPEARS TO MARY

READING

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. 12 She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” 14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. 15 “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” 16 “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”). 17 “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message. John 20:11-18 (NLT)

TEACHING

In this story, Mary Magdalene is asked the same exact question twice: “Dear woman, why are you crying?” First an angel asks her that question, then Jesus asks. It’s worth noticing that both the angel and Jesus use a term of endearment when they ask: “Dear Mary.” God loves Mary and already knows the answer to the question. Mary is crying because she believes that someone has taken Jesus’ body. She still doesn’t seem to understand that Jesus is alive. Isn’t it amazing to us that God is kind to us even in our lack of belief. He doesn’t come to angrily berate us for not seeing, but to kindly invite us to look again. Mary doesn’t recognize Jesus; we don’t know exactly why. Maybe he prevented her from recognizing or maybe she was too flooded with emotions to see. Maybe it was because she didn’t expect him to be there. Maybe it was because his youthfulness and vitality were restored to him and he wasn’t as she remembered him in his final hours. Whatever the reason we do know that once Mary heard Jesus say her name, she immediately knew who he was.

Have you heard Jesus call your name? Have you heard the Spirit whisper truth to your heart? He may have spoken to you through the Bible, through a sermon, through a song, or through a friend’s kind words. God knows your name and he is calling to you to believe in him. In your moments of sorrow, keep listening and looking – he is speaking and he is faithfully working!

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RESPONSE

OPENING QUESTION(S):

- When is the last time someone really surprised you by showing up?

TODDLERS/PRE-K:

- In this story, who was at the tomb crying?
- Who asked Mary the exact same question?

CHILDREN:

- In this story, who asked Mary the exact same question?
- What did Mary think had happened to the body of Jesus?
- How did Mary respond when she realized the gardener was Jesus?

TEENAGERS:

- How did Mary respond when she realized the gardener was Jesus?
- Why is it important to hear God's voice?
- How can you hear his voice?

ADULTS:

- How and when do you plan time in your day to listen to what God is saying?
- How can you help your children learn to listen for God's voice?

PRAYER

God, thank you for coming to me in my sadness and speaking kindly to me. Thank you that you don't condemn me for my lack of strength and belief, but you kindly invite me to look again and consider again who you are and what you have done for me. Spirit, thank you for calling me by name and speaking to my heart through your Word. Give me a greater hunger for your Word. Cause me to be sensitive to your Spirit. Help me to listen and respond to what you are saying. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NEXT LEVEL (ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL TEACHING)

Mary thought that Jesus was a gardener. The case of mistaken identity makes sense because the tomb was in a garden. But why did John decide this detail was important enough to record in his gospel? Let's look at one definite reason and one possible reason.

1) Because the gospels are eyewitness accounts and Mary told the story this way. That may seem obvious but it's important to notice that seemingly unnecessary details are included only because these stories really happened and were shared as actual memories.

2) In Romans 5, Paul teaches that Adam got us into this mess and Jesus got us out of this mess. What was Adam's job? Adam, the first human, was a gardener and he failed at his task of being fully human and bearing God's image. Here we see the resurrected Jesus, the new human who was the exact representation of the Father, being mistaken as a gardener.