I have seen the Lord

John 20:1-29

Key verse 20:18 **“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.”**

Through this passage, I would like to share with you the grace of God, about how people who met the risen Jesus were changed. In this passage there are three types of people: Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas. They were all tremendously changed after they met Jesus who was raised from the dead. I pray that we may also meet the risen Jesus and be filled with the resurrection spirit and faith through this passage.

1. Mary Magdalene was changed (1-18)

It was early morning on Sunday, the first day of the week. While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body. The other gospels tell us that several women went to the tomb including Mary, the mother of Jesus (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:10). When Mary arrived at the tomb, she saw that the tombstone had already been removed from the entrance. She thought that somebody had taken away Jesus’ body and was so shocked. So, she went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, who is John, to report what she saw. Look at verse 2. She said, **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”** When Jesus was crucified three days ago, Mary was overwhelmed by great sorrow. She couldn't understand why Jesus, who was so good, had to die on the cross by Roman solders so ruthlessly. After Jesus was crucified, she wanted to immediately go to the tomb of Jesus, but she could not because it was the Sabbath. Therefore, she waited for the Sabbath to end, and early in the morning, headed for the tomb of Jesus. She just wanted to put spices on the body of Jesus. It was the best expression of her love toward Jesus who was crucified on the cross. But when she arrived at the tomb and found that his body was missing, she was terribly shocked, and even more so, she was sad.

How did the disciples respond to Mary's words? Look at verses 3 and 4. As soon as Peter and John heard from Mary that Jesus' body was missing, they ran straight to the tomb. The two of them suddenly had a marathon race to reach to the tomb of Jesus. The winner was John. He beat Peter and reached the tomb first. However, it was Peter who entered the tomb first. Look at verses 5 to 8. John who arrived at the tomb first bent over and looked in at strips of linen lying there but he did not go in. Peter who arrived later went straight into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there. Not only the linen, but also the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head was there. The old NIV version says the cloth was folded up by itself. If somebody had taken away Jesus’ body, he would have not folded up the cloth because when someone steals a corpse, it doesn’t make sense for him to take off the clothes from the corpse, then fold the clothes and only take the corpse. Then, what happened there? Following Peter, John entered the tomb and he also saw that Jesus' body was missing and that the linen and the cloth were lying there. Look at verses 9 and 10. When the disciples saw the empty tomb and the linen and the cloth, they should have realized that Jesus was resurrected. When Jesus was with them, he repeatedly told them that he would rise again from the dead according to the scriptures. However, their spiritual eyes were still blind, and they were not spiritual enough to realize that the resurrection of Jesus had already occurred. They went back home without realizing that Jesus had resurrected.

Meanwhile, Mary returned to the tomb and was weeping outside the tomb. Look at verse 11. Mary, like a child who lost her mother, was crying endlessly over the loss of Jesus. But when she looked inside the tomb, she saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been. One was at the head of Jesus’ body and the other at the foot. Look at verse 13. They asked her, **“Woman, why are you crying?”** Mary said, **“They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.”** Mary was convinced of the wrong facts. Mary was sure that somebody had stolen the body of Jesus. However, no one took Jesus' body. The body of Jesus could not be taken away because Jesus had been raised from the dead. Look at verse 14. **“At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.”** After answering the angel, Mary turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. We don’t know why she did not realize that it was Jesus even after seeing him. Maybe she didn't realize because it was before dawn and was dark. Or maybe her sorrow was too great to recognize the risen Jesus.

Look at verse 15a. **“He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** From Jesus’ point of view, she had no reason to cry. Why was she crying? Because she thought Jesus was dead and she would never see him again. Moreover, it was because she thought that the body of Jesus had been stolen. Why do people weep and cry at someone's death? Some people say that death is a natural phenomenon like water flowing from top to bottom. However, if this is true, why do people cry and grieve over the death of their loved ones? No one cries or grieves when they see the water flowing. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. (Ro 6:23) Death is God's punishment for human beings who had sinned against God. So, death is painful. No one enjoys death. Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:55 that death stings like a bee towards human beings. We call this the power of death. The power of death includes sorrow, fear, anger, depression, anxiety, doubt, hatred, arrogance, despair, futility, helplessness, meaninglessness and so on. Death stings at human beings with great power. People who have been stung by the power of death live a helpless and miserable life. The reason Mary Magdalene was gripped with sorrow was because of the power of death. Before she met Jesus, she lived a sinful life. As a result, she was possessed by seven demons. However, she was forgiven by Jesus and became a faithful woman of God. After that, she loved Jesus so much that she broke an expensive jar of perfume and poured it at Jesus' feet. She also served Jesus’ ministry with her whole heart. And she stood beneath the cross of Jesus until Jesus' crucifixion was over. She was faithful and loyal toward Jesus. However, when she did not have resurrection faith, she became a woman of sorrow. Because of this, she cried endlessly. She was helpless and powerless. She did not have hope. Look at verse 15a again. **“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** The risen Jesus spoke to her who was crying out of sorrow, but she did not know that Jesus was resurrected. Jesus was saying that she did not need to cry because he was resurrected from the dead, thereby crushing the power of death. We also cry like Mary when we lose our loved ones. But we do not need to cry before death because Jesus gave us forgiveness of sins and eternal life through his crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus crushed the power of death by his resurrection not just for Mary, but also for all of us. In the risen Jesus, there is no death and no power of death. If we believe in Jesus’ resurrection, we are forgiven of punishments and have eternal life. So, Jesus says not only to Mary, but all of us **“Women, men, boys, girls, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** In the risen Christ, death is no more punishment of God. In the risen Jesus, there is no power of death. I praise Jesus who was resurrected and gave us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. I praise Jesus’ resurrection which frees us from the power of death and gives us eternal salvation.

Look at verse 15b. Even though Mary heard Jesus' voice, she still did not recognize Jesus. She thought he was a gardener and asked if he had moved Jesus' body. Look at verse 16. **“Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).”** Jesus called her by her name **“Mary.”** A name can be said to represent who he or she is. Knowing or calling a person by name means that he knows that person. It is like a shepherd who knows his sheep calling them by their name. At that moment, the sheep responds to the voice of his shepherd. Jesus knew Mary and called her by name like a good shepherd. Then, she responded to Jesus' voice. She recognized Jesus and said, "Rabboni!" which means “Teacher!”. Mary finally realized that Jesus was alive and resurrected. Jesus was surely resurrected from the dead. Now, she stopped crying and was overjoyed with Jesus.

Look at verse 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.”** Realizing that Jesus was resurrected, Mary was so happy that she tried to hold on to Jesus so that she might live with Jesus forever in this world. But Jesus told her not to hold on to him because he had not yet ascended to God. Instead, what direction did Jesus give her? Look at verse 17b again. **“Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”** When we observe this verse very carefully, we can find two things that Jesus gave her. First is that Jesus gave a living hope in the kingdom of God. Jesus told her that he would be ascending to God. By saying this, he taught her that the kingdom of God exists, and planted a hope for the kingdom of God in her heart. What kinds of hope do you have in your heart? 1 Peter 1:3 says there is a living hope. What is the living hope? The living hope is what was given through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it is to hope for what is kept in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade. In other words, the living hope is believing in the resurrection of Jesus and having hope for the kingdom of God. If a student hopes to study hard and get good grades, that's good. If a person wants to work hard and earn money to become rich, that is good too. However, if such thing is not done to reveal the glory of God, but for one's own greed and selfishness, or if it has nothing to do with God's kingdom, it is not a living hope but just a meaningless dead hope. We must have the living hope for the kingdom of God by the resurrection faith.

Second is that Jesus gave her a holy mission to be a witness of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus told her to go to the disciples and tell them about his resurrection. This was her holy mission The risen Jesus gave a mission to those who met him after he was resurrected. Jesus gave the mission not only to Mary, but also to the 12 disciples and the apostle Paul. The mission they received from the risen Jesus made all of them very great. In the 2,000-year history of Christianity, there have been many heroes of faith, but they would not have been born if they did not have a mission from God. The holy mission from God made them great. Our UBF missionaries, who received the mission from the risen Jesus to spread the gospel to all the people throughout the world, are great, too. Not just the missionaries of our meetings, but all the servants of God who are preaching the gospel after receiving the holy mission from God are great before God. Look at verse 18. She went to the disciples with the news and said, **“I have seen the Lord!”** And she told them that Jesus had said these things to her. She said with confidence, **“I have seen the Lord!”** She was no longer crying but became a witness of Jesus’ resurrection. She was changed from a woman of sorrow to a woman of mission. The risen Christ transformed her into a great woman of God.

1. The disciples were changed (19-23)

Look at verse 19. It was the evening of the first day of the week. It could have been the evening of the day Jesus was resurrected. The disciples must have heard from Mary that Jesus was resurrected. However, they did not believe the news of Jesus’ resurrection that she preached. They thought that she was talking nonsense because she was so shocked by Jesus' death. The disciples were together, with the doors locked in fear of the Jewish leaders. They knew that the Jews had plotted and killed Jesus. They thought that now it was their turn. They were overwhelmed with fear, thinking of the terrible persecution they would face from the Jewish leaders. They were overwhelmed with fear. They were under the power of death. When we look at Luke’s gospel chapter 8, we see that Jesus healed the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. He came to Jesus to ask him to heal his dying daughter. But when Jesus was on his way to heal her, Jairus heard that his daughter had already died. At this time, Jesus said to him: **“Don't be afraid, just believe.”** Here, we learn that fear comes from lack of faith. People are afraid when they do not have faith in God. They are afraid of their uncertainty for the future. Students are afraid of getting bad grades. Employees are afraid of losing their jobs. Do you know what people over the age of 50 talk about the most? Their main talking topic is about health. They always talk about their health whenever they meet. It is because they are afraid that they may get some disease and die suffering. The disciples were also afraid of the Jewish leaders when they did not have resurrection faith. Look at verse 19b. When they were afraid, Jesus came to them. He stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you.”** After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands that had been nailed to the cross, and his side, which had been pierced and spilled water and blood. The disciples could not deny that it was Jesus standing in front of their eyes when they saw his hands and side. Jesus was surely resurrected. When they saw Jesus, they were overjoyed.

Look at verse 21. **“Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** God sent Jesus to this world as a man of mission so that he might complete his mission as a Messiah. Jesus is the first missionary sent by God from heaven. Likewise, Jesus sends his disciples into the world to preach the gospel. However, Jesus knew that his disciples were still too weak to go all over the world and preach the gospel. So, he said in verse 22. **“And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”** Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would guide them and help them to preach the gospel. Jesus said in verse 23 how important the preaching of the gospel is. When we look back at this passage, Jesus came to the disciples when they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. When they met the risen Jesus, they were changed into kingdom workers. When we look at the book of Acts, we come to know how boldly they were changed into the great servants of God. Peter and John made five thousand men believe in the Lord when they preached the Word of God despite the persecution from the Jews. They were never afraid again after meeting the risen Jesus. The risen Jesus transformed the disciples into the brave and great servants of God.

1. Thomas was changed (24-29)

Look at verses 24 and 25. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not there. So, the other disciples told him, **“We have seen the Lord!”** The disciples preached with certainty that Jesus was resurrected. It was an undeniable fact that the disciples saw Jesus. But what was Thomas' response? Look at verse 25b. **“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.”** 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.”** He said he would not believe that Jesus had been raised unless he saw with his own eyes the hands where Jesus was nailed, put his finger there, and then put his hand into Jesus' side, which had been pierced by a spear. He seems to be an ancestor of rationalists or positivists. It may have been difficult for Thomas to believe that Jesus was resurrected. It was because it was impossible for the dead to live again. However, Thomas' response was disappointing because he personally saw many miraculous signs performed by Jesus during his public life. Jesus even foretold many times that he would rise again from the dead three days after his death. He should have remembered the words of Jesus when the disciples told him that he had resurrected. He should have tried to be a man of faith rather than doubt. Doubt is the most potent weapon of the devil. Today, there are many people who are poisoned by the doubt of Satan. They say that they won't believe something unless they see it or experience it themselves. However, there are many things in the world that we believe in even if we do not see or experience it ourselves. For example, I've never met the former President Abraham Lincoln before. However, I believe that he was a great leader who freed black slavery as the 16th President of the United States. Some people have never been to Japan or China, which are located on the other side of the world from the United States, but they believe that people live there. If you believe that people do not live in South Korea just because you have not been there, I will be very disappointed about that. It is because I lived there for more than 30 years with many other people in South Korea before I came to USA and I believe that many people including my mother, my brother, and my sister still live there. How foolish it is to say that I must see and experience for myself to believe that Jesus was resurrected! We must be people of faith, not doubt.

Look at verse 26. A week later, when the disciples were in the house again, Thomas was with them. The doors were still locked. Even though Thomas had decided to doubt, Jesus visited them to plant faith in his heart. The Risen Jesus could have gone back to the Father to sit on his glorious throne, but he humbled himself to visit the disciples one more time for Thomas. And Jesus said to them. **“Peace be with you!”** Look at verse 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.”** Jesus wanted Thomas to be a general of faith rather than a monster of doubt. The Risen Jesus let Thomas reach out his hand and put it into his side. Now Thomas saw Jesus’ wounded hands and side and shouted, **“My Lord and my God!”** Thomas’ doubt disappeared and he became a man of faith. Look at verse 29. **“Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Jesus told Thomas that those who believe without seeing are more blessed. Today, these words apply to us. We have not seen the resurrected Jesus with our own eyes. But, as Jesus says, it is more blessed to believe without seeing. Hebrews 11:1 also says that faith is being certain of things we do not see. Thomas, who met the risen Jesus, was no longer a man of doubt. He became a man of faith and a brave servant of God. According to tradition, he went to India as a missionary to preach the gospel and was martyred. What made him change like this? The risen Jesus transformed him into the great servant of God.

At this time, I would like to share with you the grace of the resurrected Jesus in my life. Many years ago, when I was young, I lost my elder sister to heart disease. She left for heaven on a snowy day in wintertime. At that time, she was 13 years old, and I was 12. I couldn't understand why my sister had to die when she was so young and pretty. The thought that I would never be able to see or meet my lovely sister brought me sorrow and despair. I became a man of sorrow missing my sister. I felt meaningless and became nihilistic about life when I thought that death can take away a human being forever. I had a negative feeling about God, and I did not go to church anymore. I left God and lived a sinful life. However, God took pity on me and led me to be invited to one-on-one Bible study at UBF when I was a college student. Through Bible study, I would meet the risen Jesus and accept him as my savior and Christ. When I attended the UBF Summer Bible Conference in 1989, the risen Jesus came to me through today’s Bible passage, John 20:15. Just as the resurrected Jesus visited Mary in sorrow, he also came to me saying, “Luke, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Jesus helped me to stop crying as I was looking for my sister but have hope for the resurrection and have resurrection faith. After overcoming sorrow and meaninglessness about life, I became a Bible teacher and lived the life of a missionary to preach the gospel of Jesus’ resurrection. While I was preparing today's message, I looked back on the grace that God gave me a long time ago. It has already been 34 years since I met the risen Christ through the Bible conference. I believe that the driving force that has sustained my life so far is the power of the risen Jesus. It is also by the power of the risen Jesus that I came to the United States from South Korea as a missionary. Although I have served in God's ministry, I have repeatedly failed many times in my mission field. I was not such a good missionary. However, the Lord challenged me again and again to have resurrection faith. God kept training me, especially through my job. When I count how many jobs I had after I came to the USA, it comes to almost 20. Doing 20 kinds of jobs is nothing to be proud of, but God helped me learn how to challenge my faith when I fail. Through job training, God continued to train me to rise again from my failure and despair to have resurrection faith in the risen Jesus. These days, God gave me a suitable job and now I enjoy it. I hope that God may give me no more any other job. However, if God want to give me another job, I can do it with my faith of resurrection. I can shout in the risen Jesus like apostle Paul, **“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”** I thank God who was with me in my life and led me to meet the risen Jesus. I praise God who led me to live by resurrection faith and made me the witness of the risen Jesus. I pray that I may continue to live as a missionary to preach the gospel of resurrection to college students.

In conclusion, Jesus rose again on the third day after he died on the cross. The risen Jesus transformed Mary Magdalene, the disciples, Thomas, and me. The risen Jesus has the power to change people to be great and live for the glory of God. May God bless all of us to meet the risen Christ Jesus and be transformed to be useful and great people of God and God’s servants for the glory of God. May God be with us to live by the resurrection faith. Amen.