MY LORD; MY GOD

John 20:1-31

Key Verse: 28

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

In the last lesson of Jesus’ arrest and trial, John testified to the fulfillment of God’s prophecies in the events: Jesus said to those who came to arrest him, “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” Then John commented, “This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled, ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me’” (18:9) And Jesus said to Peter, “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” It was God’s will for Jesus to take this cup. Even the scene of an official striking Jesus on the face fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5:1, “With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek” (ESV). When the Jews said, “We have no right to execute anyone,” John recorded, “This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled” (18:32). And at the time of Jesus’ death, John wrote four times that the words of God were fulfilled. The Roman soldiers who executed the death of Jesus, their deeds and words, their mean act of dividing his clothes, saying “Let’s not tear it, let’s decide by lot who will get it” were the fulfillment of God’s prophecy: John wrote, “This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my clothing among them and cast lots for my garments” (Jn 19:24; Ps 22:18). In 19:28, “Later, knowing that all was not completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.” And in 19:36, “These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken” (Ex 12:46), and, as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced.” Jesus’ hanging on the cross with two other criminals and his burial in the tomb of a rich man were all done according to God’s prophecies. In short, Jesus’ arrest, trial, death on the cross, and burial were all acts of God according to the prophetic words of God. Now, in John 20, John distinctly records the fact of Jesus’ resurrection, especially the empty tomb and Jesus’ personal encounter with Mary Magdalene and Thomas. Mary said, “I have seen the Lord!” Thomas confessed, “My Lord and my God!”. Our Lord Jesus is the one who died for us and rose again from the dead, not just died for us. If he had not been raised from the dead, he would not be our Lord. He was indeed raised from the dead and so he is our Lord. Let’s carefully observe what John wrote regarding Jesus’ resurrection.

In verses 1-9, John vividly testifies to the empty tomb. Three people are mentioned here: Mary Magdalene, Peter and John himself. It was 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. At this surprising, totally unexpected sight, she concluded that the enemies took away the body of Jesus. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, that is John, and reported this to them: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” Surely, Peter and John were not indifferent. Their thoughts must have been filled with Jesus crucified and dead. So right away they started for the tomb. Both were running. Of course, they could not just walk. This morning there was a lot of running. Mary came to them running. The two disciples headed to the tomb running. There is a very interesting description about this particular run – who got there first and what each one did according to each one’s character. John, who was young and probably more athletic, outran Peter and reached the tomb first. What did he do? He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but he did not go in. John was careful, cautious, and considerate. Then Simon Peter, who could not run as fast as John, arrived. What did he do? He went into the tomb since the tomb was like a cave cut in the rock/out of the rock. Peter was bold and brave. Inside the tomb he saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. John had written carefully that at the time of Jesus’s burial, Joseph of Arimathea wrapped the body of Jesus in strips of linen. And then here John saw the strips of linen and Peter also the strips of linen lying there. But John describes one more thing: there was the burial cloth put around his head, folded up by itself, separate from the linen. It was not likely at all that somebody had taken away the body of Jesus as Mary thought, but that the body had been evaporated. Verse 8 says, “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.)” What careful observation and a detailed and factual description!

Matthew and Mark also testified to the empty tomb through an angel’s message “He is not here.” Luke testified to it through the two angels’ message, “He is not here” and also through Peter’s eye witnessing of the strips of linen lying there. But John did not record the angels’ message but testified to the empty tomb through Mary’s experience, particularly his own eye witnessing to the tomb’s emptiness, with neatly arranged strips of linen and burial cloth on the head. We believe that in history, no one’s tomb was empty except those from which whole caskets were taken, with some other valuable things inside being stolen. John clearly testifies that the tomb was empty with no possibility of the body of Jesus being taken away by someone: who would unwrap the dead body when they stole it? Therefore the empty tomb is a powerful testimony to the resurrection. Yes, to the human mind the dead rising from death is totally nonsense. But the empty tomb without the resurrection is also wholly nonsensical on the condition that no one stole it. There are many theories that refute Jesus’ resurrection such as that the women went to the wrong places; Jesus did not actually die completely but fainted; it was some people’s hallucination; and/or that the disciples came and stole his body. However, the Bible silences all such refutations: women saw the burial places and knew where he was buried; Jesus surely died, confirmed by the water and blood that came out of his body due to his heart bursting; and the risen Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at the same time. Among all such theories, the disciples’ stealing the body seems to be the most powerful. But as we have considered already, this theory is impossible for the disciples were full of fear and locked in a room. When we consider all this, the empty tomb without the resurrection is truly nonsense. The sound human mind needs to come to the conclusion of the resurrection. It can be compared to creation. It is nonsense that something comes out of nothing. Yet it is more nonsense to think that something came out of impersonal things rather than a personal being. It makes much more sense to believe that things, countless wonderful things, came out of One who is much more intellectual and creative than humans, than to believe that anything comes from just dead matter. Which is more logical and scientific? Human beings should really give careful thought. Truly, careful, and sound human logic reaches the conclusion of resurrection through the empty tomb, the empty grave. Amen!

Of course, the Bible does not just testify to the empty tomb but to the witnesses of his resurrection. John introduces the risen Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene, to his disciples and to Thomas. Specifically, John seems to focus on 1:1 encounters Jesus had, as in the case of Mary and of Thomas who were not that well-known people.

Mary’s encounter with Jesus is written in verses 10-18. Mary Magdalene suddenly appears at the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection according to John’s gospel. Until that time, there was no mention of Mary Magdalene. Accounting Mark and Luke, she was the one out of whom Jesus drove seven demons (Mk 16:9; Lk 8:2). She was from the town of Magdala. That’s all we know. But Jesus met her first after his resurrection. Certainly, this was God’s sovereign grace. Yet, we see Mary’s faithful love for Jesus. Even though Jesus died and was buried, Jesus was still her Lord. She had said in verse 2, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb.” And here, the disciples, Peter and John, went back to their homes. But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. Then what happened? As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb. She 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?” meaning you don’t need to cry, for he is risen and alive. Yet, Mary responded, “They have taken my Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him.” She was still traumatised. Yet, she wanted to know where they had put him.

Saying that, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. Her tears probably covered her eyes and Jesus’ appearing was totally unthinkable to her. But Jesus said, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” She thought that he was the gardener and said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.” Certainly, Mary was looking for Jesus, though he had died. She wanted to save even the dead body of Jesus. We don’t know whether she had strength to carry the body. But she was desperate to get even the corpse of Jesus. The dead body of Jesus would not be beneficial to her at all, rather burdensome. Yet she wanted to get the body. Her desire for the body of Jesus is expressed three times: in verse 2 “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him, in verse 13 “They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him, and here in verse 15, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” It is notable that she did not say, “I will get it”, but “I will get him.” It indicates that Jesus was still living in her heart. She was sorrowful because she could not get Jesus and not because her future would be miserable without Jesus. Jesus himself had been her life and hope. As for the disciples, when Jesus died and was gone, Jesus was not their expected Messiah anymore. They were sorrowful and felt miserable, for their hope through Jesus was broken to pieces. Mary truly loved Jesus.

We heard of the sudden death of Sophie’s uncle. Among the family members, the issue was for the body to be brought to Canada from Ghana, or his cremated body. Sophie’s grandmother, the mother of the uncle, wanted the body to be brought and buried, though it was costly; otherwise, it would be buried there. However, other family members’ opinion was that it should be cremated. In that situation, the mother’s love was distinguished. M. Sarah once told me that if she died before me, she would not mind to be cremated since we would be resurrected with a glorious body and she did not want to give me any financial burden. On hearing that, I was troubled and unhappy. At this time I say, “Nope, no way.” Paul said, “Love is not self-seeking.” Truly, it is not seeking what is practical. Love is not pragmatic. It is not calculative. I was a legalistic sinner who found it hard to see the world of love. But the Lord, in his mercy, has been working in me to open my eyes to see the world of love more and more.

Mark 16:9 says, “When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.” For a long time, I wondered why Jesus appeared to Mary first. I realize that it was because of her love for Jesus, not forgetting the wonderful grace of Jesus. Here Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher.) We are reminded of Jesus, the good shepherd, who calls his own sheep by name. The risen Jesus remembered her and called her by name, “Mary.” What a beautiful love relationship! This love relationship is forever.

Interestingly, in this chapter when John said of himself, he wrote, “the other disciple, the one Jesus loved.” In writing about the upper room dialogue, John said in 13:23, “One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved…” Even though Jesus died, still he wrote here in John 20, “the one Jesus loved.” John was sure that Jesus loved him. We believe that Jesus loved all of his twelve disciples. Yet, John felt that Jesus specially loved him, because he assured the love of Jesus. We can say that one of the most significant messages of the Bible is “God is love” and he loved me to the point of sacrificing his own Son for me. This love of God is the love of Jesus. Those who have the assurance of this love of Jesus can love him. Love and resurrection faith cannot be separate.

Jesus said in verse 17, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Because of love for Jesus, Mary did not want to lose Jesus and tried to hold onto him. But Jesus wanted Mary to know that he was now glorified and had to return to God. Then he would come back in the Holy Spirit, not in the visible form, until he returns to the earth as the Son of Man. Meanwhile, if she loved Jesus, she would carry out the mission to tell others of his resurrection and ascension. He said, “Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” What a precious mission! What a marvelous revelation! Through Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our Father in heaven meaning we are children of God. Jesus’ resurrection, God raising Jesus from the dead shows that God was fully satisfied at the Son’s sacrifice of death on the cross for our sins, our sins were carried far away, and we were indeed justified. Romans 4:25 says, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” A hymn song, “One Day”, it says, “Living, He loved me; Dying He saved me; Buried, He carried my sins far away; Rising, He justified freely forever.” In Jesus, we are children of God, sons and daughters of God! What an utmost blessing! So John exclaimed, “How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 Jn 3:1). Thank and praise God. Also, Romans 8:17 says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ…” And Romans 8:29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

In verse 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.” What a precious and powerful testimony!

What happened next? On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for the fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” In that fearful situation, what the disciples needed most was peace. No one but Jesus could give such peace, the peace from God, different from the peace the world gives. After saying, “Peace be with you,” Jesus showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. We are reminded of the song, “Deeper, Deeper”, “Joy in the place of sorrow; peace in the midst pain, Jesus will give, Jesus will give, he will uphold and sustain.”

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.” We are reminded of Genesis 2:7 which says, “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” This breathing of God was done at the time of creation. Now here is the new creation through the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ death and resurrection. At the time of the Pentecost, indeed there would be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. In the power of the Holy Spirit, they would be sent out as gospel workers for the forgiveness of sins as Jesus said, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” With the proclamation of the gospel there would be forgiveness of sins.

Let’s see Jesus’ encounter with Thomas. In verses 24 and 25, “Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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 it.” What a demand! He did not just say, “Unless I see him…” or “Unless I see his nail marks in his hands and see his side…” Thomas wanted not only to see Jesus’ hands and side, but also to confirm them with his finger and hand. It was a strong and willful unbelief. He seemed to be very sick with skepticism. Who is Thomas? In the synoptic gospels, his name is written only once, in list of the names of the twelve disciples. But John mentioned him two times before. When Jesus was going to Judea with his disciples although there was a danger for them to be stoned to death in John 11, Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (11:16). He appeared to be a man of willpower. And in John 14, when Jesus said of his going to the Father and coming back to take his disciples, Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Thomas seemed to think that the way to heaven was like the way to a certain place on the earth. Jesus responded, “I am the way and the truth and the life…” What Thomas said was a sort of will rejection of Jesus’ teaching. That was Thomas. He seemed to be the last person to believe Jesus’ resurrection.

But Jesus did not forget or ignore this Thomas. He came to visit him. In verse 26 it says, “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the door were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Thomas must have never expected such a visit from Jesus. It was a week after the first visit to the disciples. In his limited time to stay on earth after being raised from the dead, Jesus visited them again, especially for the sake of one person, Thomas. The disciples were still in fear in the locked house and needed peace, saying, “Peace be with you” to all of them. Yet, Jesus specifically said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.” Surprisingly, Jesus exactly remembered what Thomas had said and responded to it. How mindful and delicate the risen Jesus is! Finally, Jesus said, “Stop doubting and believe.” The risen Jesus is full of grace and truth. The way to overcome doubting is to stop doubting and believe; do not fear, do not worry, do not doubt, but believe. In such grace and truth, Thomas must have not needed to put his finger into the nailed hands and his hand into the side of Jesus. His personal confession came out, “My Lord and my God!” Who is the Lord? He is the one who was nailed to cross and died for our sins and also raised from the dead. Jesus Christ is the Lord. He is God. Paul said in Philippians 2, God raised Jesus who was obedient to death and exalted him to the highest place so that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord (2:9-11).

In verse 29, Jesus then told Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” This “blessed” refers to all those who would believe in Jesus through the words of the Bible. One’s belief becomes firm and secure on the ground of Scripture. The words of the Scriptures are our certainty and sureness and true security. I thank God for the richness of the Scriptures, abundant evidence of Christ’s suffering and death for our sins and his resurrection. Truly sincere response to the words of God leads a person to believe in his death and resurrection. I really thank God that we could study Jesus’ trial, death on the cross and his resurrection depicted in Matthew, Luke and John. Jesus was absolutely innocent, not guilty at all. But he was tried and sentenced to death and handed over to be crucified. On the cross he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” God’s wrath was fully poured out on the Son and he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” At this moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus said, “It is finished” and called out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” and breathed his last. The tomb was empty and the message came, “He has risen!” All together how powerful and convincing the testimonies are!

How fitting Thomas’ confession is as the conclusion of our study of the series of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection! “My Lord and my God!” In this passage, “Lord” is written 6 times (2, 13, 18, 20, 25, 28). No one can be my Lord, but the one who died for me and rose again from the dead. Again Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is the Lord,’ and believe in our heart that God raised hm from the dead, you will be saved.” How are those who make this confession to live? Paul says in Romans 14:7-8, “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” May we live such a life! More practically it is written in Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Last Monday, I heard that Sara’s second daughter Ruthie went to see a doctor. It was because one of her toes was in a lot of pain, with hairs entangled and digging into her flesh and bones and even touching nerves. She underwent surgery the hairs were removed. She baby cried a lot. Still, there was the possibility for the toe to be amputated. I sensed that it was a kind of warning sign that something even worse can happen. The Lord gave life and can take it anytime. We should deeply acknowledge him in every area of life and live in the right fear of the Lord with full trust in him, the Lord, and live and die to and for the Lord. Amen!

Lastly in verses 30 and 31, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” As you know the Christ is the Messiah in Hebrew, meaning “Anointed One.” The Hebrew term *messiah* is rooted in a verb that means “to spread a liquid over.” It is written in Jeremiah 22:14, “…So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates/paints it in red.” Here “paints” is in Hebrew *“mashach”* meaning to smear, anoint. It is to spread oil on someone or something. In Exodus 29, the altar was to be anointed with oil, and in Exodus 40 the entire tabernacle was to be anointed with oil. It meant literally “to set apart for spiritual usage, to consecrate, to identify as sacred, to take it out of the secular and set it apart for God.” So that happened to certain objects in the Old Testament. But more importantly, it happened to certain people; kings, priests and prophets. They were anointed ones, messiahs, each with a sacred duty, a king to bring God’s rule on people, a priest to take the people to God and a prophet to bring God’s truth to people. No king or priest or prophet can cross the line of each one’s office. None of them is ever called “Savior,” “Lord,” or “the Messiah.” But Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, combining all three offices as the true king, perfect priest with his unblemished whole sacrifice and the complete prophet with full revelation of God’s words. And according to Psalm 2, God chose his Son to be the Christ, the Anointed One. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, have life that is true and eternal through believing.

Thank and praise God for the resurrection of Christ Jesus. May we live with this confession in our lives, “My Lord and my God!”