

Risen Brother—Ascended King
John 20:1-18
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Stories about resurrections and angel visitations are strange, but they are inadmissible only if we have decided already that God is not real.

I) Some evidence for the resurrection of Jesus

A) Jesus was gone (the tomb empty)

They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him
Not even the enemies of the early church disputed this

B) The grave clothes were still in the tomb

v. 5: And stooping to look [John] saw the linen cloths lying there

- Why there at all?
- Chrysalis...

C) He appeared to Mary Magdalene

- Not a credible witness in that culture
- Why would John use her testimony?

II) What does the resurrection of Jesus mean?

A) A friend in high places

Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father

- The ascended one is one of us
- He is our brother
- He knows our names: *Mary!*

B) We can't limit Jesus to simply being our friend

Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father

The Biblical story answers more than, "How can I safely find God?"

Some ways to stop clinging

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) One of the reasons we have difficulty believing in the resurrection is that we have prior doubts about the existence of a God who is real. What makes believing in a real God implausible in our time?
- 2) No one disputes that Jesus' tomb was empty. What are some possible explanations and what sense do they make?
- 3) Why did John present Mary Magdalene as the first witness to the empty tomb and to the risen Christ (N. T. Wright calls her "the apostle to the apostle") when women's testimony was not received in his era?
- 4) N. T. Wright points out in his masterful *The Resurrection of the Son of God* that nothing in the arsenal of first century belief systems, even among the relatively small number of Jews who believed in resurrections (notably the Pharisees), can account for the particular "mutation" (Wright's word) of resurrection (one man raised in the middle of history) that sprang to life shortly after Jesus death and formed the cornerstone of the church's proclamation. The most reasonable explanation by far for this mutated message is that the disciples were proclaiming what actually happened. What other explanations come to mind? What merit do they have?
- 5) When Jesus speaks of ascending in John 20, he is clearly speaking of something different from resurrection. It is related to resurrection—following necessarily upon it—but it is not the same thing. What is the difference? What does Jesus' ascension add to his resurrection? (Daniel 7:13-14 should help)
- 6) Jesus' words in John 20:17b echo those of Ruth in Ruth 1:16-17. What do they suggest about the quality of Jesus' commitment to us?
- 7) Mary recognizes Jesus when he says her name reminding us of Jesus' words in John 10:27. What comfort do you derive from the exchange with Mary?
- 8) By clinging to Jesus Mary was not letting him ascend to his full glory as the Lord of lords. How do you do this?