

A Race to an Empty Tomb

Thomas Robinson, August 1, 2010

John 20:1-10

¹ 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**.

² So she came running to **Simon Peter** and **the other disciple**, the one Jesus loved, and said, "***They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!***"

³ So **Peter** and the **other disciple** started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were **running**, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the **strips of linen** lying there but **did not go in**.

⁶ Then **Simon Peter** came along behind him and went straight **into the tomb**. He saw the **strips of linen lying there**, ⁷ as well as the **cloth** that had been wrapped **around Jesus' head**. The cloth was still **rolled in its place**, separate from the linen.

⁸ Finally **the other disciple**, who had reached the tomb first, also **went inside**. **He saw and believed**. ⁹ (They **still did not understand from Scripture** that **he must rise from the dead**.)

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.



Genesis 1:2-3

² The earth was without form and void, and **darkness** was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ And God said, "***Let there be light,***" and there was light.

John 11:23-27; 43-44

²³ Jesus said to her, "*Your brother [Lazarus] **will rise again.***"

²⁴ Martha said to him, "*I know that he will rise again in **the resurrection on the last day.***"

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*** ²⁶ *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*"

²⁷ She said to him, "*Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*"

⁴³ Jesus called in a loud voice, "*Lazarus, come out!*" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "*Take off the grave clothes and let him go.*"

Luke 24:12

¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed**, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For **this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality**. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "***Death is swallowed up in victory.***"

The First Day of the Week

Just as before the crucifixion, the Beloved Disciple (“John”) prepared us with means for understanding by recounting Jesus’ last conversations with his followers, so now, after Jesus’ death and burial, John helps us step by step to grasp what happened.

He records his own memories, experiences of others around him. He leads us through the process of the transformation of faith, what it means to enter the world defined by Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection. So much they didn’t understand at first!

He does not want us to make it too easy, simply believing some facts. Yes, there are facts. Events happened. Their reality forced them to realize that the world was different from what they had thought. Everything changed: past, present, future, the center and purpose of life, the power for transformation, the very core of life.

It was the first day of a new creation. Like that first Sunday morn when out of the darkness God said, *“Let there be light!”* Jesus had finished the work of the old creation on the sixth day, Friday; lay in the tomb on the seventh day. Sometime before dawn of that Sunday, the event happened, preparing for light to dawn.

What Mary Magdalene Assumed

John focuses on Mary’s experience and testimony. She, like Peter and the B.D. had been with Jesus, believed in him, followed him devotedly, no doubt trusted all that he said, would still be at his side if he were alive, but... Death was the end of all hopes.

She saw the stone removed and only fear and pain gripped her heart. The tomb had been closed; someone had opened it; only one possible reason. She wants help. There’s so much more they want to do to honor Jesus, who had meant so much. Her words are torn: “Lord”— powerful. “they took”— powerless. “We don’t know...”

None of them expected resurrection. None believed such was possible in their lives. Resurrection meant the end of this world, new creation. God remaking the world.

What Peter and the Beloved Disciple Saw

Peter and B.D. race to the tomb to intervene if possible and find Jesus’ body. The B.D. records details that have no particular significance: I got there first. Peter went in.

Nothing made sense. Yes, stone removed. Jesus’ body gone. But the linen cloths that had been wrapped around the body were still there. The head covering was still rolled and in place. No caretaker who moved the body would have unwrapped it. No grave robber or opponent would prefer to carry an oozing, bloody, mangled body rather than a neatly wrapped corpse. No one would have, could have left things as they in fact were. What did it mean? They had been invited in by a moved stone.

Jesus’ resurrection is often treated as a myth or fake simply made up by the disciples. (Based on modern disbelief in God: It could not happen, therefore it did not happen.) It’s important to see that they had no desire to create such a story, indeed, did not expect or believe in such a thing until they were confronted with the reality of it. If we can be skeptical of our skepticism, even we post-moderns can hear their testimony.

Seeing and Believing

The B.D. articulates the mystery, surprise of faith. He saw, he believed! Jesus had given them the resources to understand, but they had not yet put it together. Ongoing.

He gives his testimony as an invitation to enter that journey into a new world of life and hope. Death is not the end. Jesus embodies a new world, God’s new creation life.