

A Brand-New Day

Scottish author and poet, George MacDonald, must have been a morning person because he wrote:

Something is wrong in the man to whom the sunrise is not a divine glory.¹

How do you feel about sunrise? Have you ever SEEN a sunrise? Seeing the sun crest over the Gold Building in downtown Hartford at 10 o'clock doesn't really count as "sunrise." But remember when you were a kid and your parents told you, "I'm setting the alarm for when it's morning. So, you can't come into Mommy and Daddy's room until the alarm goes off, okay?"

I remember when we first started the early service here on Sundays. Back then, I think it started at 7:45 a.m. We didn't have Sunday school and stuff like that planned because we didn't think we'd get families with little kids that early. But the first week, we had several families with all kinds of little kids. I said to one of them "Wow! I'm so surprised to see you all here!" The mom said, "Yeah, well, we've been up for hours, so we just decided to come to church!"

Poets and songwriters have had an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward sunrise though, if you think about it. From Emily Dickinson's *I'll Tell You How the Sun Rose*, to the Beatles *Here Comes the Sun*, sunrise seems to have always stood for something good, like a new start, a new chance, a 'do-over.' I don't think there's a person on earth who couldn't use a 'do-over' once in a while. How about you?

Our Scripture today describes another sunrise, a S-O-N rise, a spiritual new day. And I think there are more than a few similarities between the physical sunrise and the spiritual Sunrise. Let's consider that today. First...

I. At Sunrise, Light Is Evident Before the Rising.

In verse one of John 20, it says:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb... (John 20:1)

While it was still dark... that's early! She must have been waiting for the dawn. Have you ever waited for the dawn? People who wait for the dawn are usually anxious about something and the dawn is like a door for them to go through, to leave the waiting room and get to a better place. That was certainly true for Mary Magdalene. The other gospel writers tell us that it wasn't just Mary but also two other women who were anxious to get to the tomb, thinking they could prepare Jesus' body with the required ointments and oils for a proper Jewish burial. On the way, walking in the dark, Mark records that the thought struck them, "Who's going to move the stone for us so we can get into the tomb?" Oh, yeah, the stone...

I love this about the Bible. It gives us the real details of real people so we can realize, "You know, that's probably something I would've done. The women had great intentions but not a very complete plan. God bless 'em! That's like me."

But do you also see the teaching point here? They're going, in the dark, with a half-baked plan, to serve Jesus. Have you ever walked in those shoes? You look back on it now and say, "What was I thinking?" But when the women get there, it doesn't matter WHY they came. It just matters THAT they came. Do you see this? If we had to wait for the male disciples to go check

the tomb, it could've been weeks! They were hiding! They were thinking about themselves and their own safety. The women were thinking about one thing, "What's good for Jesus?"

You see, the dawn of a new spiritual era was already beginning to spread its light, even though it wasn't all completely clear. Mary tells Peter and John that the tomb is empty. But she doesn't think it's because Jesus was alive but because someone stole His body! Even after going back to the tomb and seeing two angels, she still thinks it's a body-snatching! It's dawn, the Son has risen but everything's not completely clear yet. The plan is still... unfolding.

Do you remember when you were first checking out Christianity, how it didn't all make sense immediately? Remember that? Mary was actively looking for Jesus and there was legitimate evidence to point her to the fact that He had risen from the dead, but she wasn't processing the evidence well. I mean, look at the evidence she had:

- The stone was rolled away.
- The tomb was empty.
- The grave clothes were still lying there.
- Two angels appeared (angels!) and talked to her.

Now, we look back at that and can't believe that she didn't get it, but we weren't there, were we? What evidence did you have before you became a Christian, but you still didn't 'get it'? You know, we've had people in this church with stage-four cancer, whom the doctors told, "There's no hope of a cure for you." But as people prayed, they miraculously recovered and lived full lives. But when they talked to their relatives about it, their relatives said, "Wow, you were really lucky." They had evidence of a miracle but they just weren't processing it well.

Or we point out to some people how Jesus fulfilled several hundred prophecies from the Old Testament that were proclaimed over a 1,500-year period, all referring to the Messiah. And their response is, "Well, those were self-fulfilled prophecies. He manipulated the circumstances so he could fulfill them." Oh, you mean like having Himself be born in Bethlehem to a mom who lived in Nazareth? He manipulated that? Or you mean like having Himself crucified between two thieves, having his garments gambled over, dying with no broken bones and then being buried in a rich man's tomb – each of which was predicted by a separate prophecy? He manipulated that? You know, a lot of us have been like Mary. We didn't process the evidence God gave us well. Which leads us to a second fact about sunrise, which is that...

II. As Soon as the Sun Rises, so Do Light and Warmth.

My dad was an early riser so a lot of the time we spent together was at (or before) sunrise. So, I love sunrise! For example, he loved golf and he'd go golfing regularly with his friends but he'd take me along as his caddy. I was about eight-years-old when we started that. And it was always early, early. I remember one place we played where we'd start before the clubhouse was even open and we'd pay when we made the turn.

Or, sometimes we'd go fishing. We'd leave in the dark and get to the lake just as the sky was starting to get light. And this was in Minnesota, where in July it might be in the 40's! But as the sun came up, it was awesome! On the golf course, by the third hole, we could see the flag on the green! Or we could take our gloves off and fish bare-handed! What a concept!

When Mary got to the grave, it was just starting to get light. Though to her it all seemed frightening and to Peter and John it seemed confusing, it was soon going to become very light and very warm. The angels said to Mary:

...**"Woman, why are you crying?"**

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not

realize that it was Jesus. “Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers (the scardycats!) and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:13-17)

Ya gotta love Mary. I mean, it’s pretty obvious that Jesus’ whereabouts are a big emotional deal to her, right? I mean, she’s crying over a corpse. But she’s also blinded by her emotions, isn’t she? Where’s that all coming from? Do you know Mary’s background?

In Luke 8 we read that Jesus delivered Mary from demon possession. She had seven demons persecuting her. Do you know anybody who’s been demon-possessed? Well, do you know anyone who’s chemically addicted? It’s pretty similar. In fact, in several places in the New Testament, we find reference to people who practiced the ‘magic arts’ or occultic, demonic arts. Do you know what the Greek word is for that? *Pharmakeia*, from which of course, we get the word “pharmacy.” Well, Mary was ‘addicted’ to seven drugs and Jesus delivered her from that, all in one day. Do you see how you might have been ‘blinded by emotion’ if you had been Mary?

So, Mary is frantic to find Jesus and everything else is just noise to her – the empty grave, the angels, even Jesus who she at first confused with the gardener. Until, that is, until He speaks her name. Isn’t that cool? Isn’t that true? We never forget how someone we love speaks our name, do we? And here’s another cool thing: in the Greek, in every place before this where Mary is mentioned, in the Greek it’s *Maria*. But when Jesus speaks her name, in the Greek it’s *Mariam*, possibly her full name.

So, where do you find yourself in this story? Do you know what I mean by that? I mean, where are you in your relationship with Jesus right now? Mary thought she’d lost Him. She was frantically searching for Him. How is it with you? Are you here today because you’re looking for Jesus? You can’t seem to find Him anywhere! Or are you here today trying to hide from Him?

Either way, the reality is He’s been right next to you all along. You just thought it was the gardener! But now, here, today – He’s speaking your name. D’ya hear Him? You might say, “Oh, come on. Why would Jesus be looking for me?” It’s simple really – He’s crazy about you. Max Lucado puts it this way:

There are many reasons God saves you... But one of the sweetest reasons... is because he is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in quite a while. If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he’ll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart... Face it, friend. He’s crazy about you!²

He is. Now, are you that fond of Him? Before Jesus went to the cross, He told us why He came. He said:

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:9, 10)

Do you have that kind of a life today – life to the full? If not, do you know how to get it? If not, let me show you how... at the end of this chapter, John writes this: (John 20:30, 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.

My fifth-grade Sunday school teacher was a man named Herb Johnson. He owned a furniture store and taught Sunday school to fifth-grade boys on Sundays. He was a great teacher. We studied all kinds of different Bible stories in his class, but over the whole year, we only memorized one verse. It was this verse, John 20:31. Do you know why? He said he wanted us to know this verse really well because then someday in the future, if we ever met people who wanted to know how they could have this ‘life to the full’ that Jesus promised, we could share this verse with them and they would know. So, I’m taking Herb’s advice. Would any of you like to have this “full life” that Jesus said He came to give? Let’s do it right now. Let’s pray...

This verse says that “...*these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...*” Do you believe that? Then tell Jesus that silently right now. Just pray, “Jesus, yes, I believe that.”

This verse also says that “...*by believing you may have life in his name...*” This means that by believing what Jesus taught, you will have life in His name. Jesus taught that all people are separated from God by their sin but if we confess our sins, He’ll forgive us. So, confess your sin right now by simply praying, “Jesus I know I’ve disobeyed You and I ask that You forgive me.” Pray that to God silently right now.

Finally, just thank Him silently because instantly you have become a son or daughter of Almighty God and you have the guarantee of eternal life!

“Jesus, on this Resurrection Weekend, you’ve done it again! You’ve made it possible for many people here to begin a Brand-New Day in their life. We can’t thank you enough!” Amen.

Now, there’s one last thing. When Jesus appeared that evening in the disciples ‘hideout,’ what did He say? He proved it was Him by showing them the wounds in His hands and feet and side and then He said two things:

... “Peace be with you!” (John 20:19)

Which He actually said twice. And...

“...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

So, if you have ‘life to the full’ today, whether you’ve had it for 40 years or if you just received it today – GO TELL SOMEBODY! And if they ask, “Well, how could I get some of that?” Follow my fifth grade Sunday School teacher’s advice. Memorize John 20:31 so you can tell them:

...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. (John 20:31)

Now, in all our worship rooms, we turn it back to your site pastor...

¹ George MacDonald in *Discovering the Character of God, Christianity Today*, Vol. 39, no. 8

² Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder* (Dallas: Word, 1995)