

**My God and Your God**  
**John 20: 11-23**  
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There is something so beautiful about the post-resurrection narratives in the gospels, including this one from the Gospel of John. There's no fanfare. There's no multitude of heavenly host lighting up the sky with song. There are no distinguished visitors from afar. In the beginning of John's account, it is just two angels, Mary, and her risen Lord. The resurrection comes in - not like a great wind, earthquake, or fire - but like a still small voice whispering the name of the beloved. "Mary."

Mary, who had been outside of the tomb weeping and the disciples, who were inside the locked doors of a house beckon us to join them because the resurrected Jesus appears to a people in grief. About a week or so into our sheltering in place, an article kept showing up in my social media feeds as various people were passing it around. It was a short Harvard Business Review article entitled "That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief," in which the author interviews David Kessler, widely considered a foremost expert on the subject of grief.

I found it to be such a helpful article because I had not necessarily identified what I was experiencing, or what we were experiencing collectively as grief. But the more I thought about it, I realized there were some things I've been grieving and it's likely that we are all carrying different kinds of grief, big and small, at the same time. And it just seems important that we acknowledge it. It matters, it is valid, and God sees it. However big or small the grief you are carrying is, it matters to God. Sometimes, we feel guilty for feeling sad if the cause of our pain seems so trivial compared to the suffering of another we think is greater. But let's give ourselves permission to call it what it is. Like Mary, we may very well be weeping outside of the tomb, wondering where Jesus is. If not, I know for a fact that most of the time, like the disciples, we are confined to the walls of a house wondering what the future holds.

And so John, like the other gospel writers, tells this part of the story so gently and intimately, as if to respect and honor the depth of the disciples' grief.

Once Mary encounters Jesus, there is so much going on that we need to take a step back for a moment. Recall the opening words of the first chapter of John's Gospel we often hear during Advent: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John begins his Gospel by evoking the story of creation in Genesis 1 - "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.." And in the account of creation in Genesis 2 we have God breathing life into Adam and placing him in a garden.

On the morning of the 1st day of the week, as light was piercing the darkness, Mary is weeping outside an empty tomb in a garden, when she encounters Jesus whom she mistakes as the gardener. The only thing that would make the connection more explicit is if John had said Jesus was wielding a rake, shovel and a garden hoe. But he might as well have been because the big picture behind this intimate encounter is that the new creation has begun in Jesus Christ. We miss the power of the resurrection if we leave it alone as an amazing thing God did once; an anomaly in an otherwise predictable world. It is the “starting point of the new world” God is creating. It begins in Jesus. But here comes the surprise - Jesus’ followers will be commissioned to be part of the inbreaking of this new creation.

Mary is the first to be sent; in that way she is the first apostle. After the beautiful moment of recognition when Mary hears her name spoken by her dear teacher and Lord, and presumably throws her arms around Jesus like any of us would do, Jesus tells her not to hold on to him because he hasn’t yet ascended to the Father. And then he sends her, saying, “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Here we see in Jesus’ message a unique feature of John compared to the other gospel accounts. It seems like Jesus is burying the lead. He tells Mary to tell the others he has not yet ascended to the Father but perhaps she wonders, “Should I first tell them you were raised from the dead?”

Unlike the other gospel accounts, the announcement outside of the tomb is that Jesus will soon ascend to the Father. John binds together the death, resurrection, and ascension into a cohesive picture of the fullness of Jesus’ mission. Think back again to the big picture of John’s Gospel. The Word Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning; he became flesh and dwelt among us; he was revealed to be God’s son, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was raised from the dead and will ascend to be with the Father. It has come full circle.

There is a remarkable shift in Jesus’ language in the second half of his message. One of the limitations of the English language is that we don’t have the versatility of 2nd person pronouns that other languages do. I use the same word “you” whether I’m addressing a foreign dignitary or a toddler throwing a tantrum. Spanish, like many languages, has different words for “you,” the uses of which depend on things like formality and level of respect for the person being addressed. I always feel very dignified and important when someone addresses me using the formal and respectful “Usted” in Spanish. But I really felt like I had arrived somewhere special when in Honduras I was addressed with the “vos” form of “you,” which is reserved for only those people with whom you have great confidence and comfortability. The first time I heard it, I thought “I’m in!”

Throughout John’s Gospel, and particularly in what is known as the Farewell discourse in chapters 14-17, Jesus consistently uses phrases such as “the Father,” “my Father,” and “the Father who sent me.” He refers to his followers as disciples, servants, and

friends. Hear the shift in Jesus' language: "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Oh they are so in! Something new is happening. In Jesus Christ, not only has a new creation begun but in Jesus Christ God is also forming a new people, a new humanity, a new family of daughters and sons to share the good news.

This new family apparently didn't give much heed to their sister Mary's words because they're still huddled together behind locked doors. But we shouldn't be too hard on them.

They just went through the greatest storm of their life. And Jesus, who can certainly handle a locked door if he can handle a sealed tomb, appears and says to them, "Peace be with you." They see his hands and side - it really is him! He says again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Mary was the first to be sent, and now the others join her. As God breathed life into Adam, and breathed life into the broken bones of Israel in Ezekiel's vision, Jesus breathes the new life of the Holy Spirit into those gathered. The Spirit will be the guiding presence as the family of God tends the gardens of new creation.

Friends, Jesus calls us sisters and brothers just like those disciples the evening of that first day of the week. And just as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us. We are at all times the sent people of God. The church is always on the move. But what can it mean to be sent when you can't go anywhere?

There's a phrase we say from time time that we don't go to church; we are the church. Right now we're living through a season where we are reminded of that fact every day. We are the church wherever we are. So it can mean all sorts of things to be sent and there are examples all around us. We can be sent right now to our families, cultivating a sense of wonder in God's creation by going outside more than we ever have before. We can be sent to our neighbors by picking up groceries, delivering medicine, and making masks. We can leverage technology and be sent to anyone who just really needs to connect. We can be sent to graduating seniors by telling them how proud we are of them and by planning the biggest and best celebration we can muster in these circumstances. The possibilities are endless because in God's new creation, brothers and sisters, the mission field is endless. "As the Father has sent me, says Jesus, "so I send you." Amen.

### Resources

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>