

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



John 20:1-18
“Primary Evidence”

April 5, 2015
(Resurrection Of The Lord: Easter Sunday)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

JOHN 20:1-18 "PRIMARY EVIDENCE"

3x Tomb, FAITHFUL MARY

- Layer 1** 1) vv.1-2 MARY MAGDALENE DISCOVERS AND REPORTS EMPTY TOMB. Women Witnesses, 19:25
- 1 → Now on the first day of the week **Mary Magdalene** came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, Travel, //Mk. 16:1-8, 9 and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. p.v., 19:41, Tomb Now Open, Not Inspect **EVIDENCE 1**
- 2 ← So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and **the other disciple**, the one whom Jesus loved, John's Focus On Individuals
- (* and **said to them**, "They have taken **the Lord** out of the tomb, 19:17, Lament (3x), Grave Robbing (vv. 2, 13, 15) and we do not know where they have laid him." Mk. 16:1, Not Alone! 13:33, Nowhere To Mourn, Complete Rites Mt. 28:11-15, Body Theft (Mt. 27:64, 28:13-15, Gospel of Peter 5:30)
- Layer 2** 2) vv.3-10 EMPTY TOMB CONFIRMED BY TWO OFFICIAL WITNESSES(MALES). Lk. 24:12
- 3 → a Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. Travel, Curiosity Aroused
- 4 b They both ran, but *the other disciple* outran Peter and reached the tomb first; Low Entrance
- 5 and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 19:40, **EVIDENCE 2**
- 6 c Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; Dt. 19:15 Two Witnesses
- he saw the linen cloths lying, (7) and the napkin, which had been on his head, **EVIDENCE 3**
- not lying with the linen cloths but *rolled up* in a place by itself. p.v., Refutes Theft, Unlike 11:44
- 8 b' Then *the other disciple*, who reached the tomb first, also went in, Not Resuscitation// Lazarus
- and he saw and believed; 20:7, 29, 10:17-18 (Believe Without Seeing) Her Report? Resurrection?
- 9 for as yet *they* did not know the scripture, that he *must* rise from the dead. **LATER EVIDENCE 4**
- 10 ← a' Then the disciples went back to their homes. Puzzle? No Personal Revelation Yet/Appearances Of Risen Lord 5:31-32, 2 Witnesses, Dt. 19:15
- Layer 3** 3) vv.11-12 ANGELOPHANY = REVELATION BY ANGELS. Remains After They Leave! 1:51
- 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; Return
- 12 → and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, Ezek. 9:2, God's Activity
- one at the head and one at the feet. 10:17-18, Body's Gone! Ex. 25:10-22, Placement, **EVIDENCE 5**
- Resurrection Not Proclaimed In Jerusalem If Tomb Not Empty
- 4) v.13 ANGELS' QUESTION AND MARY'S ANSWER.
- 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" 3x Wailing (vv.11, 13, 15) *my* (5x)
- (* She said to them, "Because they have taken away **my Lord**, Tomb Robbers? Used For Magic? and I do not know where they have laid him," Grave-robbing = Capital Offense
- Layer 4** 5) v.14 THE HIDDEN ONE IS PRESENT BUT UNKNOWN. vv.14ff. = Recognition Scene (5 Parts), Appearances Begin, 1 Cor. 15:3-5
- (a) Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, Dark. Partial Sight, Behind Her
- (b) but she did not know that it was Jesus. Divine Cloaking = Property Of Resurrection Body Must Be Revealed From Other Side, //Lk. 24:13-35, 36-49; 21:4
- 4') v.15 JESUS' REPEATED QUESTION AND MARY'S ANSWER.
- 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" 2 Questions! 1:38 They Do Not Proclaim
- Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 19:41; Wrong Inference, 1:38, Lk. 24:16, 31
- (* "Sir, if you have carried him away, Removed A Body Not Legally Deposited? Mt. 28:13-15 tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Accuses Him!
- An Unmarked Or Unmourned Grave Was Shameful
- Layer 5** 3') v.16 CHRISTOPHANY = REVELATION OF THE RISEN JESUS. Reversal
- 16 © Jesus said to her, "Mary." *Miriam*, Personal Revelation! 10:4, Is. 43:1
- Held For Her! Church Not Invent Women Witnesses! **EVIDENCE 6**
- (d) She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-boni!" (which means *my Teacher*) 10:3-5,14,16,2;16:20 (Joy) Saw Him Crucified, Same Man, 19:25
- Layer 6** 2') v.17 RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION CONFIRMED. Incarnation Continues, New Form
- 17(e1) a Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, Tangible, Prohibition = Stop! 13:33, Old Relationship Ended, Mt. 28:9-10
- b *for* I have not yet ascended to the Father; 16:25, 20:22, 2 Parts Of Jesus Exaltation, Reason, "for"
- a' but go to *my* brethren and say to them, Mt. 28:10, Christ's Agent: Mission To My Brethren (Kind For Traitors!)
- b' I am ascending to *my* Father and *your* Father, to *my* God and *your* God." Adoption = Gospel (14:2, 1:13)
- Axis Shifts! They Are Now Included In His Relationship To The Father
- Layer 7** 1') v.18 MARY MAGDALENE REPORTS THE RESURRECTION & ASCENSION. FAITHFUL MARY
- 18 ← **Mary Magdalene** went and **said** to **the disciples**, Lk. 8:2 History, Obedience, Epistle To The Apostles!
- (e2) "I have seen **the Lord**," Testify! Disciples In 20:25, Full Faith, Bodily Resurrection Explains Empty Tomb! **EVIDENCE 7**
- and she told them that he had said these things to her. Teach/Preacher! (Orthodox *isapostolos* = equal to apostles)

A Brief Treatment Of John 20:1-18

This thought unit is the first of four resurrection encounters (20:1-18, 19-31, 21:1-14, 15-25). The surface structure is a 9:1 concentric pattern with 5) v.14 at the center and 1) vv.1-2 // 1') v.18 as frames. Verbal inclusions include *Mary Magdalene* (v.1//v.18); *the other disciple* (v.2a) // *the disciples* (v.18a); *said to them* (v.2b) // *said to the disciples* (v.18a); *the Lord* (v.2b // v.18b, also near the center, v.13b). Parallel sections within the frames are 2) vv.3-10 which confirm the empty tomb // 2') v.17 which confirms the ascension, 3) vv.11-12 an angelology // 2') v.16 a Christophany, 4) v.14 a dialog between the angels and Mary using the question, "Woman, why are you wailing?" // 4') v.15 a dialog between Jesus and Mary using the same question. At the center in 5) v.14 the risen-but-hidden Jesus must be revealed to be recognized. Eyes must be opened as the other world intrudes (cf. Lk. 24:13-35). The repeated theme of being *taken away* (vv.2b, 13b, 15c) ties the unit together, as does the possessive pronoun *my* (vv.13b, v.16b, v.17 [3x]), three travel reports (vv.1-2, 3-10, 11-18), and seven instances of *saw/seen* (vv. 1, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 18). The encounter with Mary has independent parallels in Mt. 28:1-10. The second empty tomb story (vv.3-10) makes better sense as a response to Mary's witness in v.18, but John brings the two together to facilitate his dramatic layering of evidence : 1) Mary sees the stone rolled away and draws a wrong conclusion without peering inside (vv.1-2); 2) the beloved disciple looks in to see the linens but does not go in (vv.4-5); 3) Peter goes inside and notes the linens odd arrangement (v.6); 4) We then return to Mary who looks in to see an angelic honor guard, but does not yet draw the conclusion of divine activity (vv.11-12); 5) the appearance of the risen-but-hidden Lord (v.14), 6) the dialog with the angels is repeated with the hidden Lord (v.15); 7) Jesus calls her name to grant recognition (v.16); 8) Mary's privilege is insight into Jesus and their new status (v.17). She is the first to see the risen Lord and testify to it (v.18). The *we* of v.2 c indicates Mary- though featured (John isolates *dramatis personae*)- is not alone.

Source and genre analysis complement the insights developed from surface structure. It appears that vv.2, 3-10 are an insert to confirm the report of a woman (women) with the verification of two men (Dt. 19:15). If vv.2-10 are removed, the story flows smoothly from v.1 to v.11. As for genre, we have two empty tomb stories (vv.1-2, vv.3-10), an angelophany (vv.11-13), a Christophany (vv.14-16), and a commission (v.17), concluding with a travel report and testimony (v.18). Mary is *the epistles to the apostles*, or -as the Orthodox term it *isapostolos*: equal to the apostles. Recent studies indicate John here employs a form from classical literature: the *recognition* scene (Gk. *anagnorisis*), where a servant recognizes a master by means of his healed scars in five parts: 1) meeting, v.14a; 2) resistance to recognition, v.14b; 3) display of a token or sign, v.16a; 4) recognition proper, v.16b; 5) attendant reaction, here in two parts: speech of Jesus (v.17), her witness (v.18). Such scenes often occur near the hero's burial place and involve voice recognition, both of which are here. The *recognition* topos also influences the next two scenes (vv.19-31, 21:1-14). Literary functions are: 1) that the hidden one (Jesus) comes to light, 2) that the distance between the two (Jesus and Mary) is overcome in touch and caution, and 3) Mary receives theological insight and a new role as Jesus' agent. John is a skilled user of tradition and convention.

The conviction Jesus was resurrected from the dead and not just exalted to heaven as a redeemed hero is grounded in two pieces of evidence: 1) that the right tomb was found empty of the body by multiple witnesses but with the linens left behind, 2) a series of appearances in which Jesus was tangible, identified by his wounds, possessing marvelous new powers (i.e. appearing in closed rooms), and spoke with his disciples, Mary Magdalene being the first. The inference is that surprisingly- since resurrection was thought by Jews to be a communal event at the end of the age- Jesus has already entered the fullness of the future kingdom and come back in preview of a new creation. His movement continues!

PRIMARY EVIDENCE

“I have seen the Lord!”

A game-changer from an unlikely witness.

J O H N 2 0 : 1 8

Until his death in December 2011 Christopher Hitchens was one of the so-called *new atheists*. His grasp of rhetoric and British accent made him a favorite of mine in his many debates with Christian theologians and philosophers. Though I disagreed with almost everything he said, he said it so well!

Hitchens and friends are convinced we who believe in a transcendent, personal, Creator are wrong, and not only wrong but dangerous because we teach lies to our kids. And if *theism*- the belief in such a God- is out, then so is Jesus, since the whole of his life is grounded in the God of the Jews he called *Father*. And if Jesus is out, the church is a long, pretentious, expensive joke. The stakes are high and the dominoes many. In fact, much of what you value is at stake, since the taproot of Western culture and the foundation of its institutions are historically Christian.¹ It’s a bold move on their part. Point out the flaws of the church and undermine the uniqueness of Jesus; but their really big move is the to wipe the theistic God off the map and be done with the whole of religion in order to build a brave, new world where secularism reigns. Life is nasty, brutal, short, a thoughtless collision of atoms, and the only meaning is what we make up. No design, no designer, no afterlife. In a word, bleak.

In a 2010 trip to Portland, Oregon, Hitchens - author of the bestselling book *God Is Not Great: Why Religion Poisons Everything*² - was interviewed by Unitarian minister Marilyn Sewell, who began this way:

¹ For the recovered history of a culture-building church, see Rodney Stark, *The Victory Of Reason: How Christianity Led To Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005); Thomas E. Woods, Jr., *How The Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (Washington: Regnery, 2005).

² (New York, NY: Twelve Books, 2007).

“The religion you cite in your book is generally the fundamentalist faith of various kinds. I'm a liberal Christian, and I don't take the stories from the Scripture literally. I don't believe in the doctrine of atonement (that Jesus died for our sins, for example). Do you make any distinction between fundamentalist faith and liberal religion?”

Hitchins then unsheathes his sword and cuts the ground out from under Sewell:

“I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the ... Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian.”

That Sewell wanted to change the topic is clear in her next words, "Let me go someplace else." But Hitchins was right. If you don't believe Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross and rose from the dead, you're not *in any meaningful sense* a Christian, a vague cultural sense perhaps, but not *classic Christianity*. It's not just another word for nice person with good behavior; this faith is defined by convictions about the meaning of several historical events. What a delicious irony that an atheist grasps the issue better than a distant spiritual cousin who bears our name.³ The issue on which everything rests is the resurrection of Jesus. Did it happen? What is its nature? And what does it mean for him, for us, and for our world?

TURNING TO THE TEXT

1) vv.1-2 The First Piece Of Evidence And Its Misreading.

The first piece of evidence is the discovery that the tomb- the one where the corpse of Jesus was seen to be buried by multiple eyewitnesses- was now empty.⁴ Jesus was dead because of crucifixion. It was certified by Roman soldiers, by friendly observers, and by those who handled the body- likely the household slaves of Joseph and Nicodemus.⁵ The wrong tomb or the wrong body- say one of the two crucified

³ R. Pritchard, "Christopher Hitchens Gets It Right," KeepBelieving.com (2-1-10).

⁴ For a defense, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2008), "The Resurrection of Jesus," 333-404; Gary Habermas, Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004).

⁵ Craig Keener, *John* (Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 2002), 1162.

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with him that day- is not an option. Late afternoon on Friday, Jesus' body- wrapped in linen and coated in seventy-five pounds of spices- was placed on the shelf of a borrowed tomb and the entrance sealed with a stone. It would be opened a year later to put his bare bones in an ossuary box and move them to a family site.⁶

What makes the first piece of evidence credible is that the empty tomb was misunderstood. The inference was not resurrection but thievery. Bodies were stolen for linen and spices but also for something many of us never consider, which was for magical purposes.⁷ Practitioners of ancient magic particularly valued the bodies of the executed, even vying for the ropes used to tie criminals to the cross and the nails that pinned them there. Since Jesus was *a man of miracles* - what his enemies termed *magic*- he would have been all the more potent as the body of a supposed sorcerer. But the culprits Mary names are the same Jerusalem leaders who conspired in his death, "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb.*"⁸ To leave a body unburied or unmourned was the final disgrace, a last indignity for an already humiliated man who saved Mary from spiritual torment.⁹ The story is told in a straightforward fashion, and while Mary Magdalene is featured, we know she was not alone, "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him?*"¹⁰

The women went early to grieve; they went *while it was still dark*, and what they discovered was a shock. The stone was *taken away*. Mary did not enter but *ran* back to Peter and the beloved disciple with a fact - the stone has been moved- and her interpretation of it, "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know*

⁶ On burial customs, see C. Evans, N.T. Wright, *Jesus, The Final Days* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2009), Chapter 2, "The Silence of Burial," 39-74.

⁷ Keener, *John*, 1181.

⁸ Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 172, "Therefore, the suspicion voiced in Mary's words is that the authorities have removed the body as an act of hostility."

⁹ Luke 8:13, Mark 16:9. On later legends that surrounded Mary and mistakenly portrayed her as a prostitute because of conflation between *anointing* stores, see Jane Schaberg, "How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore," *Bible Review*, Oct. 1992, 31ff.

¹⁰ Mark 16:1, Matthew 28:1, Luke 24:1 on multiple women early at the tomb. On the historicity of women eyewitnesses, in spite of cultural prejudice, see Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010), 349-355.

where they have laid him.” Mary was right in observation and wrong in inference.

2) vv.3-10 Three More Pieces Of Evidence For Two Disciples.

The next scene gives more evidence. Disturbed by Mary’s report, Peter and the other disciple run to the tomb. Mary was not far behind as we meet her again in verse 11. The beloved disciple arrives first, and when he stooped to look, “saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.” Why not take the valuables if they took the body? Note that with each person we go deeper: Mary outside, the beloved disciple stooping for a peek, now Peter inside, and what he sees is even odder. There lies the shroud-collapsed like an empty cocoon- but to the side the face covering is rolled up, as reported in verse 6, “...and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.”

There’s clearly been activity at the site: stone moved, body absent, shroud left, napkin rolled up, but what does it all mean? What’s clear is that neither the women nor Peter and his friends stole the body to fake the resurrection, as charged in Matthew’s last chapter, “Tell people, ‘*His disciples* came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”¹¹ The authorities were lying and paid bribes to start a spin campaign. They knew the tomb was empty, and they were not the ones who did it. What’s not in doubt is that the right tomb is empty and the linens left behind.

What happens next is confusing. The other disciple follows Peter into the tomb, sees what he saw, and- as John reports- *believed*. Believed what? That God is the explanation for the odd evidences left behind? Perhaps, but this is quickly followed by the qualifier, “... for as yet they did not know the scripture that he *must* rise from the dead.” It was only in reading the Old Testament after the fact and in the light of the resurrection that such scriptural echoes were seen. So is the purpose to highlight the disciple’s extraordinary insight, or to say it was not yet full faith? Maybe both; what is clear is that he did nothing with the insight. Verse 10 is something of an anti-climax, “Then the disciples went back to their homes.” Confusion and perplexity are part of the process of following Jesus.

Evidence 1: stone moved. Evidence 2: body gone. Evidence 3: linens present with signs of tampering. Evidence 4: future scriptural confirmation to come. The best inference within the current frame of reference is that some persons have taken

¹¹ 28:13.

the body after stripping it, as evidenced in Mary’s repetitions: “Because *they* have taken away my Lord,” and, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” A God-induced event is not on the board; that God might be the body-snatcher is not considered. It’s never happened before. It would be an event without precedent, a new thing that changes everything.

Current Jewish thinking among many was that the resurrection occurs only at the end of the age, and then to all for God to sort out in judgment.¹² No one considered only one person might be raised in the middle of time as a sign the new creation was already at work in Jesus.¹³ So what brought the pieces of evidence together in a new pattern and gave birth to the idea that Jesus alone was raised? What Einstein did for physics, which is a whole new view of everything, the resurrection did for the meaning of Jesus’ life and death. It’s a new picture of Reality and of the hidden possibilities for glory in a broken world. That Jesus’ is resurrected into a marvelously powerful new body which took up the old body as raw material is kingdom physics and new-creation biology! A single human being has conquered death, not in theory but in fact. It’s a new world out there. To see and touch and converse with him is to know what it means to say, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done one day on earth as it now is in heaven.” Jesus’ corpse on Saturday in the tomb is the perfect emblem of our broken world; his resurrection body Sunday morning is a picture of a new world breaking in, and it’s better than we imagined. God will heal creation and welcomes our participation in his project. Practicing the kingdom together puts us out of sync with this world and in sync with the coming one.

3) vv.11-17 More Evidence, And The Rest Of The Story.

Peter and the other disciple have now confirmed Mary’s fact and added new evidence. This has value since two male witnesses were required for Jewish testimony.¹⁴ The fifth strand of evidence, the one that begins to open up a fresh explanation, is found

¹² On the options, see Richard Bauckham, “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in Second Temple Judaism,” in Richard Longnecker, ed., *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 80-98.

¹³ N.T Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008), Chapter 3, “Early Christian Hope And Its Historical Setting,” 31-78.

¹⁴ Deut. 19:15.

in verses 11 and 12 where Mary enters the tomb after the guys went home. Mary now sees what Peter and his fellow runner did not. It doesn't mean angels weren't there, only that they were kept from seeing them. You only see what you are allowed to see, as when - in one of the new 3-D movies- you wear the special glasses and the person beside you does not. They see in two dimensions, you in the depth of a third.

To this point the evidence is public; it could have been verified by anyone who happened to be there: stone rolled back, linens present, body gone, excited men and women running back and forth. But the evidence is confusing, precisely because the explanation is not to be found within the expectations of a common sense world. They knew the dead stay that way. Their souls may be somewhere else, but their bodies are not in good shape. Then a threshold is crossed. Mary Magdalene stands wailing, but as she stoops to look in, a new depth of vision is given. She sees previously unseen visitors, verse 12: "... and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head, one at the feet." An honor guard!

There's no reason to believe that - had you been there with Mary Magdalene- you'd have had the same experience unless the Spirit gave you the same capacity, but this does not mean Mary is having a grief-induced hallucination or psychosis, as is popular among skeptics. She's not seeing what's not there but what's there that others cannot see unless aided. Angels are signs of divine activity, and here serve as hints of a new explanation of the facts, a major shift of paradigm.

What happens next is a collision of worlds. The angels - already knowing the answer- ask, "Why are you weeping?" They know Jesus is raised; she doesn't. It's good drama for her say it one more time, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Level 1 of the new insight is that she sees two angels. In Level 2 they converse, which is a dialog between personal beings: one human, the others angelic. We see only when allowed and converse only when permitted, but they're all around us, just out of sight, carrying out the Lord's wishes unseen. The good angels are our powerful friends.

I see progression here. Mary first observing *from outside*, then the beloved disciple *stooped at the doorway*, finally Peter *inside the tomb*. But now another level of sight is to be crossed, and that doorway must- like the vision of the angels- be opened from the other side. Mary walks through several sets of unseen doors after she passed through the physical opening of the tomb itself. Had she left, this would not have happened, but she stayed- just as during the ministry and at the cross, and

this is her great virtue: she perseveres. Jesus had given her new life and cast out seven demons; I wish the gospels had preserved the details of that story, not just the report.¹⁵ Her devotion, then and now, was in direct proportion to his gift.

Verse 14 is again a statement about divine revelation. The door to insight is opened from his side, not hers: “Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing,” then these strange words, “but she did not know that it was Jesus.”¹⁶ He was present, noticed, turned to, but somehow shielded from recognition. Was it still dark, or is it that he may not be seen unless permitted? He’s on one side of a one-way glass, she on the other. Then Jesus does the oddest thing. He repeats the angels’ question, which tell us it was originally his own, then adds a second, “Whom do you seek?” It’s impressive he does not rush but allows her to speak her mind, even with a hint of anger, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” That’s an unlikely promise, but it reflects her focus. The risen Jesus does not blast her with glory but asks open-ended questions. He gently leads her along, and she follows him towards a strange, new world.

Mary’s wailing, because that is what the word *weeping* means in that culture, is testimony to her grief. The Jesus who had- in the powers of the kingdom- given her new life was dead, and even in death desecrated, or so she thought. Mary sees angels, but not yet the next layer of having her eyes opened to see the risen Jesus. This is how it is with God’s self-revealing. Each layer is like going through a doorway for which there’s no doorknob on our side. All can look at creation and know they were made by a personal being of great power and wisdom.¹⁷ This is the grace of general revelation. But to know Jesus as Lord in the forgiveness of sins a further door must be opened, as Paul said, “For no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ *except by the Holy Spirit.*”¹⁸ To see myself as a pitiful, beloved creature is a gift of divine sight. When Scripture illumines my life a window is cracked, and if a vision or dream is given, the light is from beyond. I’ve had dreams in which Jesus was vivid, and there are times- especially during communion- when he’s felt especially near, but never have I had a waking vision, as some have.

¹⁵ Luke 8:1-3, Mark 16:9 (canonical but not authorial).

¹⁶ The theme of non-recognition is also found in Luke 24:13-35 and John 21:1-14.

¹⁷ Romans 1:19ff.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:3b.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Miriam.’” With that name he was seen, “She turned and said to him, ‘Rabbouni!’ *My Teacher.*” Mary’s brain spins as she sees the first example of what it means to be alive inside the kingdom of God. Apparently she hugged him, or fell at his feet and didn’t let go, so it’s not a ghost she’s dealing with. But his work is not complete until Jesus’ risen humanity is back with the Father in the world from which he came, the upper level of creation, the control center of the cosmos we call *heaven*. Instead of life on the road as it was before, it will be more, *so don’t cling to the old*. The Holy Spirit in him will soon be both in and among them reminding them of all he said and did.¹⁹ Mary now has a mission to act as his personal agent, “...but go to *my brethren* (a kind word!) and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.’”

This is good news, not advice for better living but news of an event that changes everything.²⁰ Through a relationship with Jesus- who he was and what he did- we are brought back into a healed relationship with God. His Father becomes ours, his Spirit within and among us. We become his brothers and sisters in a new family that starts now and never ends. The new creation has already broken out in the midst of the old.²¹ The world is flooded with possibilities if he’s alive.

There are two kinds of human beings in heaven today. Billions with no bodies, but saved souls. At peace, full of joy, seeing God, knowing one another but still with hope for something only the risen Jesus now enjoys, which is his amazing new prototype of a resurrection body. Many saved souls, but only One joined to a new creation body, and that One is Jesus. We are now saved and embodied on battlefield earth where the pain is real and the casualties many; they are now saved and temporarily disembodied in heavenly bliss after death and their exit from the field of conflict; but one day when that world comes down we will all be fully saved by being re-embodied in new creation bodies just like Jesus and with the same extraordinary powers the gospel writers strain to describe. As at the end of the Creed, “We believed in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting,” and that reality is not *up there* but *down here* in creation made new and fresh. It’s where we’re headed; earth

¹⁹ 20:21-23.

²⁰ For a fresh treatment, see N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2015).

²¹ See N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), Chapter 11, “Under New Management: Easter and Beyond,” 192-205.

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is our home, and it's going to be fixed by its Maker, and us along with it. So if you believe Jesus is Lord, plant a tree, go visit a lonely person in a nursing home, write a poem or compose a symphony, go read to a child at school, go pray for a missionary. Do something kingdom like, something whose effects will last.

Jesus had a *life after death*, it just wasn't a very long one, from Friday at 3:00 pm until his resurrection, when he entered *life after life after death*²² as his soul was rejoined to a new resurrection body in which the old one was consumed and transformed leaving behind an empty tomb and empty linens as negative evidence. *Life after death in heaven above* is not the end; it's a great layover that lasts from your death till the kingdom of God comes down from heaven to transform earth in a cosmic-wide act of restoration. Our faith is not about escaping earth to a permanent bodiless existence above. That's more Plato than Jesus. We go away for a while, then come back because God the Creator is pledged not to abandon this world but reclaim and remake it on the model of Jesus, and that's great news!

The fullness of Jesus work on our behalf is signified in a shift of pronouns in verse 17: *my to your Father, my God to your God*. We are now included in his circle with the Father and the Spirit. Our humanity, with which Jesus fully identified, is in him to be carried back glorified in the circle of God's own life. Jesus has come to bring us home, now and in the age to come when the kingdom of God does for the whole creation what just happened to him, which is the reconstitution of a unified self in a resurrection body in which the old is taken up into the new and transformed.²³ Not less but more fully human, wired for unending communion with God and one another. We taste love and joy from time to time; then we will live in it permanently and increasingly because we are forever creatures and our God forever inexhaustible.

This layer of evidence- layer six by my account- is the piece that makes sense of the previous five and puts them in a new pattern. The tomb is empty because God

²² A favorite neologism of N.T. Wright.

²³ United Methodist doctrine, in line with classic Christianity, insists on the full corporeal nature of the resurrection of Jesus:

“Article III - Of the Resurrection of Christ: ‘Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day’” (*Book of Discipline* 2012: 64).

was the graverobber. The stone rolled back not so Jesus could get out but so witnesses could get in. The linens were present because the resurrection body both consumed the former flesh and frees it from the limits of space and time as it passes through the linens in a burst of divine energy. As a hint, the risen Jesus rolls the napkin in a place by itself. How cool is that? The angels are clues God is at work. The repeated question, “Woman, why are you weeping?” is a sign our loves and losses are honored by God. Such is the divine compassion that gives us space to be broken human beings. That he knows Mary’s name and the history attached to it is a reminder no one is a number with Jesus; all are persons he knows and loves.

If resurrection happened to Jesus, and I find the evidence historically convincing and confirmed in experience, then it gives him status as the final revelation of the invisible God; it also makes the statement this world is made for glory. Hints of an Eden lost and a Paradise not yet attained are hidden in creation. In moments of beauty and ecstasy and feeling truly alive, we have hints that haunt us all our days, as if we gained a whiff of something unimaginable. It’s why the best, purest pleasures never finally satisfy but leave us with a deeper longing. We who live behind enemy lines in a spoiled world have never known a perfected creation, but that is precisely what is promised and of which we have a prototype in the risen Jesus.

4) v.18 The Preacher And The Mission.

The first time Mary ran back it was with *one fact*- a stone rolled back- and the wrong interpretation. But now, as she goes back a second time, it’s with more facts: empty tomb, empty linens, angelic messengers, risen Jesus, plus the right interpretation of them all. Her testimony, soon to be confirmed in their experience that evening, is, “I have seen the Lord,” which is followed by her delivery of all he said to her.²⁴ Will they believe her testimony? Is she just a flaky, overwrought female prone to instability and religious fantasies? For a while Mary Magdalene and the women with her are the only ones who knew the truth. What they pointed to with words and mutual corroboration, only Jesus could verify. At this point the believers are all women. Do you think Jesus should let the guys in on the secret? I do!

Mary Magdalene’s not a flake, and she was never Jesus’ girlfriend; it wasn’t a prom! But this former demon-infested lady is chosen as the first witness to and

²⁴ For a full treatment, see Gerald O’Collins, Daniel Kendall, “Mary Magdalene as a Major Witness to Jesus’ Resurrection,” *Theological Studies* 48, 1987, 631-646.

preacher of the resurrection. In a man’s world for a woman with a colorful history to be so chosen says something about the church Jesus founds. We are- I believe- to be a rich, mutual partnership of men and women followers who honor each other’s differences but do not use them in power or status games. It may be easier to have single-gender leadership, but I don’t believe it’s what Jesus had in mind. And while the Methodists are short on other counts, here I think we are right.²⁵

CONCLUSION

This sermon is a cumulative case argument in which each clue provides information which then comes together and makes sense in a visitation and revelation of the risen Lord who is touched and conversed with. The whole has explanatory power:

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| Evidence 1: | a stone rolled back; |
| Evidence 2: | a shroud collapsed; |
| Evidence 3: | a napkin folded; |
| Evidence 4: | future Scriptural citations; |
| Evidence 5: | a pair of angels as an honor guard; |
| Evidence 6: | a revelation of the risen Lord calling Mary’s name; |
| Evidences 7 and 8: | her recognition and touch and testimony, “I have seen the Lord,” which was that evening verified to ten disciples hidden away in an upper room because Judas was dead and Thomas absent. |

Empty tomb, collapsed linens, angels present, scripture read in a new light, and so the church is launched with the testimony of Mary because God raised Jesus from the dead, gave him an amazing new body and sent him back in convincing appearances to discouraged friends, a disenchanted brother James, and a sworn enemy named Paul.²⁶ Layer by layer the first witnesses- first women, then men- are led to the same conclusion. All Jesus was, all he said and did, is true; it’s for our benefit; and it’s now stamped fully approved in his surprising resurrection from the dead!

²⁵ See N.T. Wright, “A Biblical Case for Ordaining Women,” Chapter 4 in his *Surprised by Scripture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014), 65-82.

²⁶ 1 Cor. 15:1-11. On the historical evidence, see Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 330-349; also N.T. Wright, “Can a Scientist Believe in the Resurrection?” *Surprised by Scripture*, 41-63.

So who is the God we trust and that new and old atheists reject? Well, the simplest answer is that God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead.²⁷ And if you seek him, he will find you. And if you ignore the hints and don't seek him, and if you close your eyes and heart to his many approaches, then you miss out on two things: the deep meaning of your own life, and secondly God's forever party that we call *the kingdom*, which is better than the best of this world because it's this world utterly remade with all sin and evil and death removed. What God offers is a call to follow, and in the following to come to know that Jesus- the historical and now risen Lord- is the doorway back into the Triune life of God, our true home. Dr. Wolfhart Pannenburg, after a lifetime of reflection on the resurrection, boiled it down to this:

“The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong nobody would question it except for two things: It's a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, *you have to change the way you live.*”²⁸

I'm not trying to sell you something to ensure the future of an institution I serve, and I don't just mean locally. I'm pointing to realities only a risen Jesus can deliver, and the function of analyzing literary forms and weighing historical evidence is to remove false objections so we have to deal with what the church confesses head-on. As a wise man once said, “Faith can't be forced, but unfaith can be challenged.”²⁹ If this Jesus/resurrection stuff is only a clever myth or an historical illusion or just one more of the world's religious options, I want nothing to do with it. Why waste my time? But if the one I read about in four biographies is still messin' with people because of a love that won't quit, I want in because I need to be messed with. I question my ability to be a faithful follower, and I often ask in private, “Is it supposed to be this hard?” What I do not doubt is that an invisible someone is messin' with me, teasing me forward as he did Mary and Peter and the other guy, and I think it's Jesus! If he's messin' with you too, maybe we need to talk and find ways to encourage each other. I think this is what Easter's all about. If he's available, don't you want to get to know him? And if he's available and you don't, why not? Have you got something better, or is that you don't want to change?

²⁷ On the uniqueness of Jesus and Christianity, see Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2007), Chapter 25, “Jesus Among Other Gods: The Uniqueness of Christianity,” 284-291.

²⁸ PreachingToday.com search under *resurrection*.

²⁹ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2006), 114.

14 EVIDENCES FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

JESUS' EXISTENCE. That Jesus was a historical person is granted by virtually all historians and supported by ancient Christian, Jewish, and pagan sources. Modern skeptics often feel that their best strategy for denying evidence of his resurrection is to deny that he existed.

JESUS' DEATH. The most popular counter to the Resurrection in non-Christian and heretical beliefs is to deny that Jesus died on the cross (e.g., this is the position of Islam). However, historians regard the death of Jesus by crucifixion as ordered by Pontius Pilate to be as historically certain as any other fact of antiquity.

CRUCIFIED MESSIAH. Crucifixion was a horrible, shameful way to die, so much so that it would never have occurred to anyone in the first century to invent a story about a crucified man as the divine Savior and King of the world. Something extreme and dramatic must have happened to lead people to accept such an idea—something like his rising from the dead.

JOSEPH'S TOMB. All four Gospels agree Jesus' body was buried in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish high council (Sanhedrin). This is an unlikely Christian fiction, because Christians blamed the Sanhedrin for their role in Jesus' execution.

WOMEN WITNESSES. The four Gospels all agree that the first persons to find the tomb empty were Jewish women, including Mary Magdalene. It is very unlikely that anyone would make up such a story, since women's testimony was devalued compared to men's and since Mary Magdalene was known as a formerly demon-possessed woman. If the empty tomb story were fiction, one would expect that Joseph of Arimathea, already identified as the tomb's owner and a respected male leader, would be credited with the discovery.

ANCIENT THEORIES. The earliest non-Christian explanations for the origin of the Resurrection belief (mentioned in John and Matthew) were that the body had been taken from the tomb—either moved to another burial place or stolen to fake the Resurrection. These explanations conceded three key facts: Jesus died; his body was buried in Joseph's tomb; the tomb was later found to be empty.

THE TOMB WAS GUARDED. Critics routinely dismiss Matthew's story about the guards being bribed to say that they fell asleep, giving the disciples opportunity to steal the body (Matt. 28:11-15). But Matthew would have no reason to make up the story about the guards being bribed except to counter the story of the guards saying they fell asleep (see v. 15). Either way, the guards were there: the body had been in the tomb, the tomb had been guarded, and the body was no longer there.

PAUL AND LUKE'S INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTS. Paul's list of resurrection witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 coincides with Luke's account at several points, but in wording and in what is included Luke's account is clearly independent of Paul. For example, Paul calls Peter by his Aramaic nickname "Cephas," not Simon or Peter; he refers to "the twelve," Luke to "the eleven"; Luke does not mention the appearances to James or the five hundred. Thus Paul and Luke give us independent accounts of the appearances they both mention.

CLOPAS AND THAT OTHER GUY. Luke gives the name of one of two men on the road to Emmaus who saw Jesus (Clopas) but not the name of the other. If he was making up names he would likely have given both of the men names. That he identifies only one by name is best explained if that man, Clopas, was the source of Luke's account. In short, This is evidence that the account came from an eyewitness.

BROTHER JAMES. Although Luke does not mention the resurrection appearance to James (the Lord's brother) mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, Luke does report that James had become a leading member of the apostolic group (see especially Acts 15:13-21). Since Jesus' brothers had rejected Jesus during his lifetime (John 7:5), Paul's reference to Christ appearing to James is probably based on fact.

JOHN'S EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT. The author of the Gospel of John emphatically states that he was an eyewitness of the death of Jesus, of the empty tomb, and of resurrection appearances of Jesus (John 19:32-35; 20:2-9; 21:7, 20-25). Either he sincerely had these experiences or he was lying; appeals to legend or myth are out of the question here.

ANCIENT SKEPTICISM. Luke reports the skepticism of the men disciples the morning the tomb was found empty (Luke 24:22-24). John reports Thomas's skepticism about Jesus' resurrection (John 20:24-26). These accounts (also Acts 17:32; 1 Cor. 15:12) demonstrate that the perception of ancient people as gullible hayseeds who would believe any miracle story is a modern prejudicial stereotype.

PAUL'S CONVERSION. Paul was a notorious persecutor of the early Christians prior to his becoming an apostle. His explanation, that Christ appeared to him and called him to faith and the apostolic ministry, is the only plausible explanation for his 180-degree change. Moreover, Paul's experience was entirely independent of the experience of the other apostles.

PAUL'S GENTILE MISSION. Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus did not result merely in him accepting Jesus as the Jews' Messiah. Instead, he saw himself, a trained and zealous Pharisee, as commissioned by Jesus to take the good news of the Messiah to uncircumcised Gentiles. The fact that Paul embraced such a calling against his former passionate beliefs and training makes any appeal to hallucination or delusion implausible.