

This Easter Week, instead of following up on Sunday's sermon as such, we are considering Mary Magdalen's life-transforming encounter when she went to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus and instead found him very much alive. Compared with Jesus's death, which saw darkness fall on the earth, the tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom and other momentous signs, the resurrection, that most significant event in history, was very understated. It is significant that the nearest we have to witness of the resurrection is Mary Magdalen: as woman at the time she wouldn't even have been qualified to be a witness.

The following questions are taken from 40 Days with Jesus, by Dave Smith of Kingsgate Community Church in Peterborough and published by CWR in 2014. © Dave Smith, 2014.

QUESTIONS

1. What evidence is there within these passages that Jesus really is alive?
2. What is the significance of Mary Magdalene being the first person to visit the empty tomb and meet the risen Jesus?
3. When Mary runs to report what she has seen to two disciples, they run straight to the tomb. Why the sense of urgency at that time? How does this compare to our sense of urgency in knowing the risen Jesus and telling others about Him today?
4. The passage says that when the 'other disciple' saw the grave clothes, 'He saw and believed'. What confidence can we have in what *we've seen* that Jesus is risen?
5. How does Jesus transform Mary's sense of hopelessness and despair? What does this show us about God's heart for us and the need for us to encounter Him in our own lives?
6. Once Mary realised that she was speaking with Jesus, what did He mean when He told her, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father'?
7. Do we ever 'hold on to' things or people when we should celebrate them but let them go in anticipation for something better yet to come?

SHARE YOUR STORY

You can discuss the following questions together as one group or, if individuals prefer, you could split into groups of twos or threes.

8. When you became a Christian, what first convinced you to believe? Allow everyone the time to briefly share their testimony if they are willing.
9. Why do you think it is important that Christianity is not a speculative leap of faith but is grounded in historical evidence?
10. To be 'really alive' is to be free from the power of darkness, the fear of death and the grip of despair. Which one of these have you found to have the strongest hold on your life in the past? What practical steps did you take to overcome it?

PRAY TOGETHER

Take the time to invite the Holy Spirit; begin with prayers of worship and thanksgiving. Pray:

- for individuals who do not know Jesus. Pray that they would have the opportunity to learn about these convincing proofs
- for anyone you know who is trapped by darkness, fear of death, or despair
- for individuals in the group that would like prayer for help in these types of struggles
- that God would intervene in world situations to dispel darkness and despair