Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

What any lawyer in court wants to prove a case is solid evidence. And if a lawyer has DNA *and* fingerprints *and* video *and* eye-witness testimony, but someone in the courtroom is still not convinced, then it is because that person does not want to believe, not because of a lack of evidence.

And that really is the major point of John’s Gospel. We have repeatedly noted John’s words from the end of ch. 20, which are that he wrote his Gospel so that we “*might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you might have life in His name*.” Later on in **1 John 1**, the same John writes, “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning [Jesus] … we have seen it, and testify to* *it*.” So with his Gospel and his letters, John wants us to have the overwhelming evidence about Jesus.

* So thus far we have about read the seven great miracles of Jesus, the seven great discourses or sermons of Jesus, and the record of His betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion, death, and burial. And we have repeatedly noted that it surpasses all of the commonly accepted standards of historical proof.
* Well, now we come to the most important part of the person and work of Jesus – His resurrection. **1 Corinthians 15:14** says, “*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*.” It is the resurrection of Jesus that completes what He came to do; it is what ultimately demonstrates that He is the Christ, the Son of God, that His life and death were accepted by the Father, and that He is the Saviour we sinners need. So the resurrection is enormously important.
* And in ch’s 20-21, we have the evidence for the resurrection. And when we are done, anyone who refuses to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, does so because they do not want to believe, not because of a lack of evidence.

So today we begin to consider the proof for the resurrection of Jesus. And although our passage begins with Mary Magdalene, we will return to her next week, in connection with vv11-18. Our focus today is Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, who we have previously identified as John, the author of this Gospel. And what we are going to see is that **the almost empty tomb convinced John that Jesus had risen**. And we will unpack that shortly but let’s just note here that it is very appropriate that we get to think about these things on Lord’s Supper Sunday. Earlier in the service we saw that the Lord’s Supper declares two things – first, that our sins have been completely forgiven through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and second, that the Holy Spirit is strengthening our union with Christ, who with His resurrected body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father. So as we eat this Supper, we declare that Jesus rose from the dead.

Well, we will begin today with some introductory comments. And they have to do with **the resurrection itself and then** **the early morning visit of the women to the tomb**. Then we want to look at **the race to the tomb** **and what happened when Peter and John got there**. And finally, we want to say a few words about **John’s response**.

1. So first of all, a few introductory words.
   1. There are two events that are a part of Jesus’ life that are so wonderful and mysterious that they were not witnessed by anyone:
      1. The first is the **conception** of Jesus. In **Luke 1:35** the Angel said to Mary, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God*.” So we are told *that* it happened and the basics of *how* it happened, but the moment of His becoming human is too wonderful and beyond understanding for human eyes to have witnessed.
      2. The second is the **resurrection** of Jesus. And again, we are told *that* it happened and that many people met Him as the resurrected Lord, but no one saw Im riseHim HimHim xxghjjkjgfhjkghdjkghjwtrywrtcvbxnvbn hHim come back to life; exactly how His body revived and became His glorified, ready for heaven body is too wonderful and beyond understanding for human eyes to have witnessed.
      3. And it is good for us to note this because while so much of what is to come is rightly about evidence and proof, the moment of resurrection is a magnificent mystery. And that is at it should be, because it reminds us that Jesus is God and He is worthy of our, at times, speechless, amazed, awe and adoration! A wow moment!
   2. But the other introductory note has to do with the early morning visit of the women to the tomb. We read in Mark that Mary was one of two women who were there when Joseph and Nicodemus laid Jesus’ body in the tomb. And in those times, the body would be laid on the preparation bench and wrapped in the linen and spices, and then placed into one of the burial niches in the tomb. But J&N had so little time to bury Jesus before the Sabbath began, it is likely that they just left His body on the preparation bench. And while John only mentions Mary Magdalene here on resurrection morning, if you read all four Gospel accounts it becomes clear that several women went to the tomb early that morning. And Mark tells us that they brought spices so that they might anoint Him. So it’s likely that J&N did, you know, a ‘man job’ of wrapping Jesus’ body (as in, just get it done), but these women wanted do it properly and then place His body in a burial niche. So they were there to re-anoint Him and bury Him properly and tenderly.
   3. But a major concern as they approached was the stone; who would roll it away from the opening of the tomb so they could get in? And it’s likely that they did not know that a guard had been posted at the tomb and that it had been sealed, because that happened on the Sabbath Day. And there is actually a lot of debate about how the varying events of what the four Gospels say happened next unfolded, but the simplest explanation is that the women arrived and saw the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene left the other women there and “*ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple* [who was John, the author of this Gospel], *and she said,* ‘*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him*.” And she would have then followed them back to the tomb, which is where later events that involved her took place.
      1. But her words to Peter and John here are very important: You see, the reason the guard was posted at the tomb was that the Jewish leaders were fearful that Jesus’ followers would steal His body away and *claim* that Jesus had risen. But there is just no room for even the hint of resurrection in the mind of Mary, one of the most devoted followers of Jesus. When confronted with an empty tomb, the only explanation she can think of is that someone has stolen His dead body. And John will be at pains to show what it took for even His disciples to believe that Jesus had risen and to understand what it all meant in relation to who Jesus is.
2. And we start to see that in vv3-7 with **the race to the tomb** **and what happened when Peter and John got there**.
   1. Boys and girls, do you ever do a bit of bragging? I am stronger? Better at drawing? Well, I wonder if you noticed that John mentions that he got to the tomb before Peter three times in these verses? In v4, he “*outran Peter*,” in v6, he tells us that Peter was “*behind him*,” and in v8, that he “*reached the tomb first*.” So is this John bragging, perhaps? Or is this a significant detail, somehow? Well, remembering that John is giving us evidence about the resurrection helps us here. **John’s point is that no-one went into the tomb unaccompanied**. He gives us this very ordinary, human account of their journey, with John getting there just ahead of Peter and peering in, as Peter arrives and goes into the tomb. And we know that Peter was always the bold charger of the disciples. So that rings true. John is careful and hesitant but Peter barges in. And as Peter is looking at the linen cloths, John enters in also. So it was John, followed by Peter, who went in first, followed by John. And the point is that no one was there by themselves and able to adjust the linen cloths to make an impression. What they both saw is “*the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself*.”
   2. So let’s pause and think about what has been described so far. The guards posted by the Jewish rulers are gone, the stone that had been sealed is rolled away, and the tomb is empty of Jesus’ body but the grave clothes are lying there, neatly. And just ponder that for a moment – if you were stealing the body, you would most likely take it *in* the linen cloths. Right? You just want to get in and get out, as soon as possible. And if for some reason you decided to remove the cloths, you aren’t going to neatly fold them; they will be all over the floor. So the only way to interpret this *almost* empty tomb is that Jesus’ body had simply risen from within the linen cloths and they fell just where they were – the body cloths where His body lay and the face cloth where is head lay. It is the only reasonable explanation and it is exactly what John wants us to conclude. Everything about this scene adds up to the resurrection of Jesus!
3. And this is precisely what John concluded, as we see in our third and last point, from vv8-10, which is **John’s response**. We read, “*Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes*.”
   1. So John believed. And we have talked before about how the word “**believed**” can have different meanings. I told you about the acrobat Blondini who took his assistant across the Niagara Falls in a wheelbarrow, balanced on a rope. And at the other side, he talked to a reporter and he said do you believe I could get you back to the other side? And the reporter said, “Yup.” So Blondini said, “Well, jump in then.” And the reporter said, “No way!” And we see something like that here with John. John believed something but his faith was not yet full because he still “*did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead*.”
      1. So what did John believe? He believed that Jesus was alive; that He had risen from the dead and passed through the linen cloths. It was the only conclusion that made sense of the evidence in front of John.
      2. But what John still did not understand and believe was that Jesus *had* to rise from the dead. And he didn’t understand that this is what **Psalm 16:10** prophesied when it talked about God’s holy One not being abandoned to the grave and not seeing corruption. And he didn’t understand that the resurrection revealed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in Him John and all believers have their forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And that would only become clear to John in the days that followed.
      3. For now though, John was convinced that Jesus was alive. That is what he believed.
   2. And that is our sermon today, congregation. It really has this one main point: Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? The evidence is overwhelming and undeniable. Stack it up next to any other detail in a historical book and it passes the test in spades! Do you believe, for example, that Brutus killed Julius Caesar? Of course he did. Do you believe that Socrates was forced to drink poison and die? Of course he did. Do you believe that King Henry had eight wives? He did. But there is far less historical evidence for those things than there is for the resurrection of Jesus. And we have only just begun! If you refuse to believe that Jesus rose from the dead, it is because you don’t want to believe, not because of a lack of evidence. Jesus rose from the dead.

Let’s pray: Help us to see and touch and taste the gospel that we have just heard