

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. John 20:3–4

## The Beloved Disciple Sees and Believes

**JOHN 20:1–10** <sup>1</sup>Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

The preceding chapter closed with Jesus' hasty burial on Friday afternoon, just prior to sundown, when the Sabbath began. The Sabbath is passed over in silence as the body of Jesus lay in the tomb. It is now Sunday morning and once again permissible for Jews to resume their regular activities. The account begins in the pre-dawn darkness, symbolizing the darkness of the world apart from Jesus. The disciples have not yet experienced the light of faith in the resurrection. But the darkness cannot overcome the light of the world (1:5). On this "first day of the week" the new creation has begun. When the "Word became flesh," Creator and creation were united (1:14). Now, in the resurrection, Creator and new creation are joined.

When Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb, she is shocked to discover that the stone has been rolled from the entrance. Her immediate response is to assume that the body of Jesus has been removed. Someone—Roman soldiers, religious officials, grave robbers—must have rolled back the stone and carried off his corpse. Mary runs first to Peter and then to "the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" (verse 2). When these two disciples race to the tomb, the beloved disciple arrives first, but he steps aside, allowing Peter to enter the tomb ahead of him.

The gospel notes that the experience of each of these three disciples has something to do with vision. First comes Mary Magdalene: she "saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." Assuming the worst, her vision is not yet complete. Then comes Peter: he "saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself" (verses 6–7). Last comes the beloved disciple: going into the tomb, "he saw and believed" (verse 8). Seeing here means much more than physical sight; truly seeing leads to believing. As the model in this gospel for all disciples to imitate, the beloved disciple sees the evidence and comes to believe in the resurrection.

The careful placement of the grave clothes is the first compelling clue that something exceedingly significant has occurred. If the corpse had been taken from the tomb, surely grave robbers would not have engaged in the useless task of undressing the body. The arrangement of the linen wrappings and the head cloth lying where the body of Jesus had been laid suggest that an unprecedented divine action has occurred.

The scene forms a strong contrast to the earlier scene of Lazarus emerging from the tomb, "his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face

wrapped in a cloth” (11:44). The raising of Lazarus was a resuscitation of his body, raised again to temporal life, to a physical body that would continue to age. Eventually he would again die and be buried again in a tomb. The resurrection of Jesus is a qualitatively different event. He is risen to new life, to an existence beyond the bounds of space and time, to an eternal life that will never end. The body of Jesus is totally transformed, in a way that the gospel writer struggles to describe and that we cannot completely comprehend.

The scene concludes, “As yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead” (verse 9). Though they came to faith, the disciples did not yet grasp the way the resurrection fulfilled the history of God’s redemption. Later, with the light of the Holy Spirit, they will read the ancient Scriptures and understand the full plan of God. This is the ongoing task of all disciples: to continually read the Old and New Testaments and understand the dying and rising of Jesus as the culmination of God’s saving plan for the world.

### **Reflection and discussion**

- What is the difference in the way the disciples experienced the resuscitated Lazarus and the risen Jesus?

- What seems to be the relationship between Peter and the beloved disciple?

- What is the evidence that helped the disciples believe in the resurrection? What did they still need to understand?

- What questions would have remained in the mind of the beloved disciple even after “he saw and believed”?

- What aspect of the faith of the beloved disciple would I like to imitate? What convinces me that Jesus is truly risen?

## Prayer

*Risen Lord, you are the light that shines in the world's darkness and the Savior who cannot be imprisoned in a tomb. Give me the energy to run to you and the insight to know that you are risen to eternal life.*