

“Experiencing the Resurrection”, Michael Gatlin, John 20:1-18, March 27, 2016

Good Morning! I'm so glad to be here with all of you today. So here is where we are going to start. I want to talk about how we are creatures who live by stories, we are stories tellers, we love to listen to stories and we love to make up stories. Like from the time when were little our parents and our grandparents are telling us stories. And we read stories to our kids and we listen and watch stories on big screens and on little screens. And in different kinds of books or comic books, we just love stories. In fact we stalk one another stories on face book; we just love to follow one another. We are naturally drawn to stories and we want to follow them through to their conclusion because they are just so exciting or so depressing. And when we have a significant experience we like to tell stories about it, don't we? For example, I have been able to go many trips and I like to tell stories of those trips. And with our kids don't we like to them stories over and over again. Brenda loves to tell our youngest one the story of his birth every birthday.

One writer puts it this way, the narrative is the central function of the human mind. That it is the central thing that we do, we think in stories we learn and understand through stories. We turn everything into a story in order to make sense out of live. This narrative actually has this vital role in helping us process our experiences so we are storied creatures. They help us navigate life and help us understand right from wrong and provide meaning. So the moral of the story is...right so this comes up over and over again. And it's not like this is something new, Plato and Aristotle wrote about how we are human beings who are telling stories so much so that our lives and our societies are formed by the stories and the myths and folk tales that we tell to ourselves and to one another. Plato went on to write that we needed to supervise the kind of stories were telling and we need to supervise the stories that parents were telling to their kids so that we could build the kind of society that we really want. Narrative it turns out is extremely powerful. The great Augustine wrote that is as we finally and fully understand and in brace the stories about God the narratives about God in the scriptures that these stories will become our ultimate source of truth and beauty in every part of our lives.

Well, as a church community we have a story. Part of what it means to be the church is that we bring our story into the story the story of God. God's story is so big and it's so expensive it is much bigger than we ever image and better than we ever have hope or dreamed that was true. And so part of what it means to be a Christian is that we bring our story into God's story. I wonder what your story is like. Like if we really had the time to sit down over several cups of coffee and could tell one another our story. And I wonder how your story as intersected with the story of what God is doing in history and in the world today. What story are you a part of? It is a good thing to reflect on and so today we are going to listen to and we are going to look at a story that is foundationally to this community right here. We are going to look at a story that is central and plays a key role

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to the whole story of the bible. It is the story that grounds us and that focuses and fosters hope and an anchor to our faith. Especially during times of confusion and unrest it is a story that really changes everything. So if you have a bible why don't you open it up to John 20:1-18 and I want to reenter into what I think is the most important story of all human history John chapter 20. I will pray and then we will read that.

Heavenly Father, gracious Son and Holy Spirit thank you for your presence here today. And thank you for the way that you love us and thank you for the way that your story is big enough to include every single one of ours. And, Holy Spirit I just pray that you would empower me as I talk and that you would really interact with every single one of us as we listen to and contemplate just a few parts of this story. In Christ name I pray and Amen.

John chapter 20 says; V1Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that stone had been removed from the entrance. V2So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" V3So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. V4Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. V5He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in. V6Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb, V7as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. V8Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb, first, also went inside. He saw and believed. V9(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) V10Then the disciple went back to their homes, V11Mary stood outside the tomb crying. V12and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. V13They asked her, "Women, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." V14At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. V15"Women, "he said, "why are your crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." V16Jesus said to her, Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni! (which means Teacher). V17Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I 'am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "V18Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

You know one of the things that become really clear as you read the different counts of this story in each of the gospels is that the resurrection took everyone off guard and it took everyone by surprise. God's intervention was completely unexpected and nobody saw this thing coming. The possibility that Jesus was going to raised from the dead was not on anyone's radar screen at all. His resurrection was utterly unexpected by everyone. You don't read anyone in the gospels who said "of course we knew all the time that Jesus

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was going to be coming back from the dead". No! His resurrection appearances as he came to people were shocking intrusions and they were blown away by this. This would be like going to your aunt's funeral and there is the casket and you watch it get carried out and put into the hearse to get driven away and you walk out to get into your car and you sit for a moment to wipe your eyes and then you go and start your car and all of a sudden you hear this tap, tap on your window right beside you and then you look and it's your aunt! It's like that kind of thing, right? It's like you see her coffin lowered into the ground and the shovel of dirt onto her coffin and you drive home and all the family is coming over and you get home and door in crack open a little bit and you're thinking who is here already? And you walk in and there she is baking the appetizers everyone will be eating. That's what it is! The gospel writers are saying I know this sounds crazy, but this is how it was. They are puzzled completely, they are saying I didn't understand at the time and frankly I'm not sure I do now, but this is more or less what happened.

The biblical scholar NT Wright makes the point that nowhere in the ancient world is there a single story of a bodily resurrection of a dead man. Death in the first century was considered a permanent one way street to the underworld and there was no u turns what so ever. Listen, we live in a world today that regards the direct intervention of God. That God would intervene in somebody's life radically as preposterous it just doesn't happen. People take it as an absolute given that God doesn't intervene that if something is going to happen like you are going to make it happen yourself and that is why there are so many self help books. The stories that we hear and the stories that we tell ourselves don't include God's intervention. And I wonder for you and I like how often do we expect God to intervene? How often do we cry out God I need help right now! Sometimes it's at our worst moments when everything is finally falling apart, but that's after so many poor choices that we have made along the way where we could have ask God to intervene. We just don't expect it in our world today and so because people don't expect this there is this lack of expectation that many people have suggested that Jesus' earlier followers just made the story up. There is no way that God could do that! And so because of this lack of expectation they said now listen I don't have time to unpack all the historical reasons why this is not a made up story. Here is a big one nobody inventing stories twenty, thirty or forty years afterwards would have done it in this way. Nobody would have inventing a story like this in the first century. You might say "what do you mean Michael?" Well, here is one point that has been repeated over and over again in scholarship but its full impact I don't think we have felt yet. The earliest witnesses to the resurrection were women. This is like a simple thing the earliest witnesses where women. What is the big deal with that? Women were not expectable in the first century as legal witnesses. There is writing in the first century that says you can't trust what a woman says period. Now that sounds incredibly rude to our ears today doesn't it? It sounds crazy to our ears. It sounded just as crazy to them in the first century that women were the one given testimony to this, just as crazy to their ears. That is one reason among many that you begin to trust the eye witness accounts to this story. Like you wouldn't have done like this. Now, I absolutely love the way we see Jesus treating woman and how we see Jesus

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treating children and ethnic minorities in the gospels. And I love how in the book of Acts we see the exact same thing. Women were treated horrible the first century and within one generation in the church we begin to see that change, where women are given dignity and honor and leadership in the early church. So, I love the way the God shows us in Jesus in his life, death and resurrection that he can completely change our world and that he can directly intervene that doesn't happen in a made up story.

Here is another way to think about it, there are two great celebrations that most churches participate in and do you know what they are? Christmas and Easter! And in our culture Christmas gets way more air time than Easter does. Christmas is a way bigger celebration in our culture. If you think about it who would you rather have come to your house Santa or the Easter bunny? I still get shivers of fear when I see people dressed up in Easter bunny costumes from when I was a kid. It looks like a demon with ears and I just don't know what to think about it. But, when you look at the emphasis of the stories in the New Testament it is completely opposite. Like if you take the gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and you remove Christmas you remove Jesus' birth you would lose two chapters that's it, but if you remove the resurrection which appears in all four of the gospels and if you take Easter away you wouldn't have the New Testament, you don't have Christianity. The apostle Paul says you are still in your sins there is nothing left.

So here is what I want to do is look at this story with a little bit more depth. So we will start here, Mary Magdalene is the first person who is introduced here. Mary met Jesus while she was in a personal crisis. Now, from what we know about her from the stories is that Mary Magdalene was financially very well off. The area from which she is from Magadha is a very wealthy community and so we find her in the gospels being able to financially independent. She is able to contribute support to Jesus and the other disciples as they went out around Israel announcing the gospel. But, we also know about Mary Magdalene that she was tormented by forces within herself that she could not fix. It says that Jesus cast seven demons out of her. And right there is a great point to being to think about our own lives. I wonder for how many of us where we have things in our lives that no matter how hard we try we cannot fix. Where cannot seem to get around those things that are maybe forces within us like addiction or possible depression or a struggle with some sort of anxiety, that we truly desire to be free of just as Mary Magdalene desired to be set free, but you can't release yourself from those things. You may have that feeling right now of being overwhelmed by your life situation and you are working as hard as you can and you don't seem to be getting anywhere. How did Mary experience this change? Well, if you look at John 20: V15 says Jesus appears to her and says "Women," "why are you crying?" he says, "who is it you are looking for?" We find Mary outside the tomb weeping. She is weeping because the person who had loved her and brought freedom to her life is dead and she thinks the body has been stolen because it's not there anymore. She is weeping because she lost the person who changed her life. She is weeping because she thinks that the only person in the world who ever treated her as being valuable and gave her a sense of dignity and made her feel worthwhile and gave

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her back her self esteem is dead, and to compound that his body has been stolen. And so Jesus asks her “Women why are you crying?” Who is it you are looking for?

Listen, if you want to experience real change into our lives it is a who that changes our lives, not a what. Jesus doesn't say “What are you looking for?” You see love really does change everything, but a what cannot love you only a who can. And there is no such thing as love without sacrifice that is why Good Friday comes first. You cannot have love without sacrifice. Love never comes from a what, I might polish my motor cycle, but it never loves me back, right? It is a one way street of love. We are changed when impersonal religion comes a personal relationship with Jesus because it's all about the who. And then Jesus addresses her personally he speaks her name. There is nothing more personal than hearing your name. You can be in a crowded room maybe in the lobby after the service and I hear someone say “Michael” and I immediately turn and I think oh no I'm in trouble again! And then I find out there's just another little boy who is as devious as I used to be. People feel hope and healing when than go through this transformation of their thinking about Christianity and God as impersonal, distant ideas and concepts and they discover that Jesus is a real living person with whom you can have a real authentic relationship with today. Stated another way, there is no human solution to the human problem! We keep coming up with a what after a what after a what! Thinking it's going to fix it! Asking the question what can help me? What can I lean on for support? That is the wrong question to start with. Start with the who because a what will never recue you the who comes first then the what follows that, and the who is Jesus! And the what is what he has done for us! We have a God who has intervencen on our behalf he is not just sitting passively by watching our downward spiral waiting for our calliopes. Rather he is our lover who has come to us in grace and mercy. And we get to invite God to intervene.

In fact the wall behind me with the flowers you see made out of white paper was a community art project and it is a picture of inviting God to intervene. We started collected prayers on Ash Wednesday identifying areas and situations where we need to see God's transforming love during lent as part of our love changes everything theme. And so individual prayers were placed at the center of these flowers to represent how God's love really does change everything, it's a visual testimony of his transforming love. Listen, the base of shame that is in our lives that as always been there from the Garden of Eden in the Resurrection is finally been broken. You can never be good enough for his love or you could earn your way into God's acceptance. He offers love to us none the less. And there is a perfect example of this right in this story in reading the gospel of John did you notice the way that John refers to himself in this gospel? He does it a couple of times in the story I just read besides telling us he won the race. He does that a couple of time too saying don't forget I bet Peter. But, here John refers to himself as the disciple that Jesus loved. I don't know about you, but when I first read that as a young man and starting to come to Christ I read that and thought man John must be kind of arrogant to write that. It would be like me introducing Brenda to you and saying this is my wife

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Brenda and I'm the one who Jesus loves. We laugh because that is kind of arrogant right, like who would do that. But, what if there is another way to look at this story. What if there is another way to think about this. What if with his interaction with Jesus where Jesus had such an impact on the entire way that John thought about himself that it completely changed his identity. That whenever he looked into the mirror he didn't see the beard that he slept on sticking out to the side or the knot of hair on top of his head. He didn't see all that stuff instead what he saw was hey there is someone there whom Jesus really loves every time he looks into the mirror. Could that ever happen for you and me? That whenever we look into the mirror we wouldn't see all the sagging or see all of the things we don't like. Or like not seeing the effect that gravity is having on our body's every day as we grow older, but what we would see is somebody that Jesus dearly loves. I wonder if that could ever be the case. What if that could happen to us? John's entire identity changed so much that he doesn't even use his name, that's crazy.

Here is the deal there is so much stuff that could happen to us in our lives when our relationship with God switches from dear occupant or dear homeowner to you're the one I love! I love you, you are awesome! It changes our lives when that happens. In verse 8 John writes that after seeing the empty tomb" he saw and believed" he writes about himself. John writes as if this was a pretty pivotal moment in his journey. What did he believe? What was there? Well, I think a big part of what he believed was what Jesus spoke to Mary down in verse 17 John writes V17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Let's read that again, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. If you just go back to that whole story building up of Jesus in the upper room with his disciples starting in chapter 13 and all the way up to chapter 17 Jesus speaks repeatedly of this new relationship that the disciples are going to have with Father as the result of his going away which is his short hand of his death and resurrection and as a result of him sending the Holy Spirit his own spirit to be with them and in them. And in this new intimacy of relationship he tells them a whole bunch of stuff like he encourages them to ask for anything that want, anything at all in Jesus' name. And he says the Father himself loves you. And gradually through those chapters were begin to see what is happening, the extraordinary, the unique and the intimate relationship with Jesus himself enjoyed with his Father is now opened to everyone. It is now opened to all of his followers.

You see Israel's vocation in the Old Testament was to be God's chosen his beloved one. Jesus fulfills that he fulfills that completely and now he shares his status as God's beloved one and all of his benefits with anybody who will put their confidence in him and anyone who will follow him. You see God's intension all along has been to draw humans freely to an intimate relationship with him and he has accomplished that through the death and resurrection of his Son. And this changes everything. Here is an example, go back to the scriptures verse 19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, will the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood

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among them and said, “Peace be with you!” V20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. V21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Do you notice how in verse nineteen and in verse one John write about the first day of the week? He brings it up two times. The last day of the week in the Jewish calendar was Saturday the Sabbath was celebrated on Saturday in went from sundown Friday night to sundown on Saturday. That was like the last day of the week and then the first day of their week was Sunday. So Jesus’ resurrection was on the first day of the week. What is our first day of the week? Monday! Ok, so ever since the book of Acts the days of the week began to get rearranged. Like how did it go from Sunday to Monday? What happened? The resurrection of Jesus, that’s what, happened! And so the early Christians so valued the resurrection that they began to get up extra early on the first day of the week before work to gather together and worship God to commemorate the resurrection of the Son of God the risen one. To put it into today’s context image every Monday morning getting up early and coming here before work and worshiping together. That’s what they were doing. It’s like before the resurrection there was no weekend. The Sabbath went from Friday night to Saturday night and Sunday you started work again. It’s like how do we get a weekend? Part of that was because of the resurrection. You know that thing that we look forward to at the end of every week that is part of what the early church began to set aside Sunday as a day to worship. And even the way we write out the date, for example today’s date is March 27, 2016. Two thousand sixteen years since Jesus was on the planet. Even the way we write out the date it is silently acknowledging who Jesus us. One writer says it like this... Like a great church bell ringing out over a sleepy town. Every time some puts a date one something it speaks the lordship of Jesus whether we listen or not.

That is amazing this changes everything and it’s not just the days of the week. Also, the way that we count time Jesus is body totally changed. He shows up into a locked room. I love the way that he shows up into a locked room. He was completely locked because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities they have no idea what is going to happen and all of a sudden Jesus shows up into a locked room and the first thing he says is “peace be with you” why? Because they are freaked out! They are like totally freaked out saying what is going on here? He has a whole different kind of new body. He can eat fish he can hug friends and walk through locked doors. That is a pretty cool new body it’s not your Casper the friendly ghost body. This is like a whole different kind of thing he can walk with friends down a dusty road he can have dinner at the end of that trip and then when they recognize who he is gone. That is pretty sweet! The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians fifteen that the followers of Jesus will at some point in the future enjoy a whole new creation with a similar kind of resurrection body. John writes in what many would say is the best book the whole bible the book of Revelation that God intends to recreate all the heavens and all of the earth and as God recreates the heavens and the earth there is somehow for human beings who are followers of Jesus a resurrection body perfectly fit for life in God’s kingdom. This is like a really cool picture when you read

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through the scriptures. But, in the mean time Jesus has a job for us. I love what he says in verse 21 in the passage I just read it was the very last thing I read. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. As followers of Jesus he has recruited us he has invited us to do exactly the kinds of things he did. In the vineyard we say it like this...we are to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world until he returns. We live the in-between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. We live in between the resurrection and his coming again. And in that in between time he has giving up a job to do. And lots of times people in church circles will say so and so have this ministry and I have this ministry and like we do this ministry. Listen, there is only one ministry, we don't have separate ministries there is only one ministry. We have been invited to participate into the ministry of Jesus, he is Lord he is captain he is King and we get to join with him. And instead of the body of Christ being just his physical body the body of Christ is now multiplied because of the Holy Spirits presence as we summit our lives to Jesus into everybody and every kind of church that the Holy Spirit lives in. Anyone who will put their confidence in Jesus and become a follower of Jesus your invited into this mission. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Well, to do what? Think of John being loved transformed John's identity completely and so John gets to invite other people into that. And when you look at his three letters at the end of the New Testament you see him as a pastor speaking to the churches that he leads and encourages them to experience that love. Mary Magdalene was set free from a bunch of stuff that we don't even know what it all is healing, deliverance and empowering. Just like Mary as were set free we pass that along. And I don't have time to talk about Thomas who had all these intellectual doubts who were really confounding him, Jesus sets him free from them. By appearing to Thomas because he wasn't in the upper room the first time all the other disciples told him about and he thought it was a bunch of...And then Jesus appears directly to Thomas and honors his intellect and sets him free. Peter who had denied Jesus and was just crushed by the weight of the guilt and shame and having denied the resurrected Lord. He meets him later on a little fishing trip and Jesus forgives and reinstates Peter. And then Peter is able to extend that over and over again to others. You see Jesus actually heals our lives as we summit to the God of love and allow him to bring healing to our lives then he brings freedom to us in a way that were able to give that a way and share that with anyone. Christ Jesus is the resurrected and living King! All authority in heaven as been giving to him and one day every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that he really is the Lord! I wonder if we began to take that seriously if things might change in our lives. Like if you knew he really was the King and every single person you ever met those who intimidate you and those who don't those you think are really brilliant and those you think are idiots that every single person will bow before Jesus one day. I wonder if that might change the way that we live our lives. I tend to think it would. The resurrected Jesus Christ is alive today!! This is our greatest day! This is the most important celebration! Easter is about the wild delight of God's creative power being unleashed in our world and now we get to be a part of it. It's about the real Jesus coming out of the real tomb and getting God's real creation under way and

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he has said vineyard church would you join me in that. Let's pray.

One of the oldest prayers in the Christian church we can find it in writing all the way back into the third century is this... Come Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit would you allow us the feel your tangible presence right now. We don't just want to detach now the Easter dinner will be there in a couple of minutes we want to connect with you. Holy Spirit, would you come right now. I wonder like John how many of us need like a touch of God's love and I wonder how like Mary how many of us need freedom we need deliverance. I wonder like Thomas how many of us need God to meet us in the place of our intellect or like Peter how many of us needs Jesus to just forgive us of the mistakes we have made. Holy Spirit I ask that you come and do that right now. And you may be here today and you never really let God in and you never really surrendered to him and I just want to invite you to do that. You may be married here today and you really have never let God be the center of your marriage the center of your family. You have never really welcomed him into that place where every day grinding relationships where you need him the most. I just want to invite you to do that to let him in. and what I encourage folks to do pray a simple prayer of surrender to him. We are surrendering to the one who everyone will surrender to in history anyway. He is the one who is in charge and when you surrender to him now he invites you into freedom, healing and deliverance that you ever hope and dream that would be possible, but maybe you have lost hope for. John says that when we surrender to God he says that God's core central character is love. He says that God is love and so when were surrendering to him we are surrendering to one who deeply loves. I don't know where you are at in your individual relationship with God, but I just invite you right now to surrender to him. Especially if you have never done that before would you. I'm just going to pray a simple prayer of surrender right now and you can use my words or you can make up your own it doesn't matter. I just invite you to throw your lot into Christ to allow the Holy Spirit to fill you fully and completely. So here is a prayer of surrender.

Heavenly Father, God I want to know you. I want to know your forgiveness in my life. And I want to know you in the deepest part of my being. So I ask today Father that you would forgive my sins based on what Jesus did on the cross. Would you forgive me and Lord Jesus would you be my savior? Would you forgive me and cleanse me? And right now today Holy Spirit I ask that you would come and fill my life. Would come in and take control and clean up the mess that I have made. I offer myself to you in Jesus' name.

One of the things we love to do here at the vineyard is pray so if you prayed that prayer really for the first time we would love to just pray with you and bless what God is doing in your life. Please just get prayer for anything that might be going on in your life. God bless you guys and thanks for coming to the vineyard on Easter.