

My God... and Your God

John 20: 11 – 18

On Holy Thursday of this past week I talked a little bit about the different versions of the story of Jesus in our four Gospels. All of them have some material that is shared by each, and all of them also have some unique material. I used the analogy of a really special family vacation. So, let's do that again, let's say this time that a family has just returned from a week in Disney World. As we would ask the parents and each of the children what they remember about that particular vacation, there will be some big events that everyone recalls – “We had lunch with Mickey!” or “Space Mountain was awesome!” but there would be other events that would turn out to be more important to individuals...

Mom and Dad would certainly remember that sense of panic when for a brief moment they lost sight of one of their children in the crowd. A child may remember a special meal, or some other simple thing that ended up having meaning for them.

And that's something like what was going on in the writing of our four Gospels. They all remember the big events – the Passion Story is almost exactly the same in each one. We have that sequence: the betrayal of Jesus, his arrest, the mock trial, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Some of the details are slightly different, but these were all eyewitness accounts. Taken together, they give us a vivid, full, picture of what took place on the wonderful day that we are all here to celebrate this morning.

One of those four Gospels, however, is very different, from beginning to end. That is the Book of John. The reason it is different, if we could go back to our vacation analogy, is that the first three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are something like the excited stories about that wonderful vacation, with PowerPoint and Home Videos put together shortly after the actual event. They tend to be chronological – linear – in their format, because their purpose is mainly to *tell us what happened*. Where did we go? What did we see? How did we react?

John's Gospel, though, was written much later than the first three, and *one* more time to go back to our 'vacation picture', we might put it like this: John's writing would be more like that of a biographer of this family. Looking back over the years, they are now telling a story about them:

My God... and Your God

why they're like they are, how they came together...and how that vacation week in Disney was so significant to their bigger story.

See what I mean? John's Gospel is more reflective; of all the material available to him, (and John was also an eyewitness) he himself says that he *carefully* selected the things he did for a specific purpose: to tell us what it means that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, so that we would also believe in him.

Now I hate to use this word, even though I love it... but John's Gospel is more *theological*. Now I realize that this word for some people is like a hypnotist's key word, and as soon as it is uttered, half the congregation goes to sleep. Don't let that happen, please! But to say that John's Gospel is more theological means that there are layers of meaning in it, there is meaning even in the structure the book – the very way it is put together is saying something. There are 'hidden' meanings (and I'm not talking DaVinci code nonsense here) I mean, things that are not immediately obvious, but become apparent the more you study it.

A couple quick examples: I mentioned in a message a couple of weeks ago that the word 'glorify' in John's Gospel is used differently than anywhere else. In John it refers to Jesus' *death*. That is a theological statement... Or the miracle stories in John are another example. He doesn't even call them miracles, he calls them '*signs*'; and to go even deeper, if you were to count them, you find that in the Gospel of John there are *seven* of them. Seven is a significant number and it shows up all over the place in John's Gospel.

That was kind of a long introduction, but I wanted you to be able to see why something that I more or less stumbled on this past week has become the point of this Easter message.

I was reading Sunday night through the Passion Story in the Gospel of John. And I read the passage from John 20 that I read to you just a few moments ago. The story of Mary Magdalene encountering the Resurrected Jesus. It is very early in the morning, shortly after sunrise. Mary is a woman who is described elsewhere as one out of whom Jesus had cast 7 demons.

My God... and Your God

So, there she is, and Jesus appears, but she doesn't recognize him at first. Some commentators have made much of this, trying to explain that it was because it was still dark, or because Jesus' Resurrected body was somehow different in appearance (both of which may be true) but I think the main thing going on here is simply that Mary stood there at the foot of the Cross and she watched Jesus die. She watched them take him down. She saw them place him in the tomb...

I know sometimes that it takes me a moment or two (I'm embarrassed to say this, but hey!) to recognize some of my own church people when I see you out of context – like in a grocery store, even though I have no reason to think that you are not alive. You know what I mean? Mary saw Jesus die! And you're just not expecting to have a conversation with someone two days after you have buried them.

But Jesus speaks her name: "Mary". And immediately she recognizes, that unexpected as this is, this is truly Jesus. Jesus said that his sheep would know his voice, and it turned out to be true for Mary. So she recognizes him, and in what must have been an incredibly emotional moment, she runs to Jesus, calling in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" my Lord, or my Teacher!

Jesus says to her, "Don't cling to me." Not, "Don't touch me", the words mean to 'hold on' to him. And Jesus says, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Then he adds: "Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

I read this passage on Sunday evening, and I had a thought. I couldn't remember coming across that phrase "My Father and your Father, my God and your God" in the Gospels anywhere else. So I made a note, and looked it up later on. And what I found was kind of surprising.

Jesus actually does use the first part of the phrase ("your Father" referring to God), quite frequently in Matthew, and Luke, and a couple of times in Mark. But he *never* uses that phrase nor the words, "*your God*" (referring to God in heaven) in the Gospel of John *until this moment*. So I started to wonder, is this one of those hidden themes of John's gospel, or is it just coincidence?

My God... and Your God

I looked up then, all of the uses of the term ‘your Father’ in John’s Gospel, and again was kind of surprised. Because the term is used five times, but *every one of them* (until this one) is referring not to God the Father, God in heaven, but to the devil! Used mostly in conversations with the Pharisees and religious leaders, where he says, “you do what your father tells you and I do what *my Father* tells me”.

Then I found this: in John chapter 16, Jesus is giving his ‘farewell address’ to the disciples in the Upper Room. And amongst a lot of teaching he says this: ²⁵ *Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.*

Stay with me... we’re almost there!

In John 17, still in the Upper Room, Jesus is now praying for the disciples, present and future and says these words:

¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, *and I am coming to you.* [That is very similar to the words “I am ascending to the Father” that Jesus speaks to Mary].

Jesus is still praying and he then asks this:

*Holy Father, **protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.***”

This is very important: Jesus is asking *his* Father to protect his children (us!) by the power of his very Name, the name that God the Father had given to Jesus, so that the believers from this time forward, would have the same relationship with God as Jesus himself did. “So that they may be one *as we are one.*”

And then here, in John 20, we see Mary, tears streaming down her face, trying to hold on to Jesus, to keep things as they were, trying to go back to the past – to the good memories, and all that... and Jesus says, ‘don’t cling... I am ascending. Everything is changing. But it is changing for the better’.

My God... and Your God

Now it is the time to speak plainly to you about my Father. The time I told you about is now. Here it is, plain talk: “Go tell all the rest of the disciples that I am ascending to my Father **and your Father**... to my God...**and your God.**”

As a result of the death and the Resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus the Son of God, something has shifted in very fabric of the universe. The door to heaven has been flung wide open and we are being constantly invited to enter into the joy of a relationship with the Living God.

The **same** relationship that Jesus himself experienced...the *same relationship that Jesus experienced with God his Father*. ... the Almighty, Holy One who is now *Our Father*... to this awesome God who, now, because the barriers of sin and death and selfishness, have been broken and destroyed... this God of Jesus, is now, in a way not possible before this, ***our God!*** Our God!

Back in John’s Gospel... I mentioned that earlier uses of the term ‘your God’ in John are only found in discussions with people who opposed Jesus. (The religious leadership, curiously enough.) There is another theme in Scripture that parallels this one. It’s the story of a great cosmic struggle, more of a war, actually, that has been going on since before the Creation itself. Kind of ‘behind the scenes’ of this physical world.

Jesus refers to this warfare in a few ways in passages that relate to this Holy Week. For example, in Luke 22, as Jesus is telling Peter that he was going to deny even knowing him. But he puts it in terms of this great cosmic warfare: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.”

When Jesus is arrested in the Garden, he says to them, “*But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.*” This is the hour of ‘darkness’, which is a reference to this intense spiritual warfare that is coming to a head around the Cross.

My God... and Your God

A few weeks ago we looked at a passage from John 12, where Jesus predicts his coming death. In talking about that, he reveals a bit of the great struggle that was going on in his very soul – a struggle that would come to a climax in his prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane. He says,
²⁷ “*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.*”
²⁸ *Father, glorify your name!*”
(And remember what “glorify” means in John’s gospel!)

So Jesus predicts his death, and in verse 31 he says, “*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.*”

There is an incredible message here that is embedded in John’s gospel... a message that tells us that there has been a spiritual shift, of proportions we can never really completely grasp from our mere mortal’s vantage point. The power of the ‘prince of this world’ is broken in the work of Jesus on the Cross.

Now, you know, in Scripture (I wish I had an hour to talk about this!) the Scriptures talk about the kind of power that the ‘enemy’, the ‘prince of this world’, however it is named, has. And I’m not going to give a lot of references here, but it can all be summed up in two familiar names: the Devil, and Satan.

Devil (*diabolos*) means: the *deceiver*

Satan (*Satanos*) means: the *accuser*

There have been a boatload of movies and TV shows – more and more these days – based on themes of the devil and demons, angels, cosmic warfare, and all that. The *horror* part is probably pretty accurate, but the *power* parts are almost never correct, Biblically speaking. According to Scripture, according to Jesus, all the power the Enemy has in this world, lies in the use of two weapons: deception and accusation.

But these weapons are used masterfully. People who are deceived believe lies and they do horrible things as a result. [Rwanda! 15th anniversary of Genocide]

My God... and Your God

Or, they become convinced that certain lies are true and they live in terrible bondage, firmly convinced that things can and will never change.

Let's get more specific: there are people who have had some horrible thing happen to them, perhaps as a child or even as an adult. Maybe someone here this morning. (Very likely.) I have no doubt whatsoever that there are people here who have some incident in your past – maybe in your present – that you deeply wish you could erase from your mind, you wish you could go back and change it. Something you either did, or that was done to you. But you know you can't. And this past is haunting you.

And you are convinced that because of that 'thing' your life will never be *good*. Because of what you've done you will never be forgiven. You believe that you are broken beyond repair. So this ugly spot inside you colors every relationship you have... it affects your sense of self-worth, your self-confidence... your joy (which you feel guilty about, because deep inside you're convinced that you don't deserve joy, or happiness.)

But that's all a lie! That's the Deceiver doing his thing in you. ... and then there's the Accuser reminding you again and again of what happened. Saying, 'you are worthless, you are dirty... you are nothing.' And things will never change. **It is all a lie:** on this Day Jesus proved that his grace is greater than *all* our sin. Jesus proved the value of every human being because his death is for *you*, and his suffering took place *while we were yet sinners*... "that proves God's love for us", says Paul.

Or, there are some here today, I know, who have become convinced by the world's flawed wisdom that your worth is based on your possessions. We even use the word, don't we? "How much is he/she worth?" meaning, how much money do they have? We've bought into that lie as a nation wholesale. So now, the economy goes south, for a time, and we have people in depression, people who feel devalued, worthless; people who can't put their finger on it, but the problem is that even though our money says on it, "In God We Trust", our trust, our confidence has been in our possessions.

My God... and Your God

It's a lie! It doesn't work! And what a clever lie it is, because we so seldom realize that we even believe it. We 'worship' God but still trust in our riches. It is a lie, but it has been overcome by the death and resurrection of Jesus – Jesus who tells us that He alone is the way, the truth and the life! Who reminds us, don't be deceived! You'll only find real joy here! And his claims were proven true in the Resurrection!

And there are those among us who have been shut down because of the ravages of a death. You've lost someone that you deeply loved. And life has just stopped. The joy is always muted, you feel that sense of sadness always, you've convinced yourself that embracing life would be a denial of your love for this person who has left you behind.

But these are lies! Jesus has broken the bondage of death! Oh there will always be sorrow in this life when someone we love dies...but the Sting of Death is gone! Death is no longer the last word! Because of today! There has been a great battle. And Christ has won!

This Day changes everything!

Jesus tells Mary – from whom he had cast out 7 demons – that *now* his Father is **our** Father... now his God is **our** God. The Prince of this world has been cast out. The lies have been exposed. And the victory is won.

It is finished! Christ is risen!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!