

Series: Come and Follow
Title: Let Go!
Text: John 20:1-18; key verse Vs 17; John 10:10
Key Word: Let go...of your grief...of old perspectives...Let go to tell
Proposition: Everyone will let go of all that which is keeping them in the grave and arise to tell Good News.

Good morning everyone. My name is Chris Farmer. I thank God that I can serve as one of your pastors. We are thrilled that you have chosen to come and worship with us today. God is in this place. He is here to reveal His presence so that we can live the life God created us to live. As we express our love for God and others, we will encounter the Risen Christ who helps us grow to be like Him and to serve the world.

For the past several weeks, we have learned what it means to come and follow Jesus. We have followed him through some critical choices while considering the cost. We followed Him into the Garden of reluctance. He led us to the Cross, where He fulfilled his purpose to save the world from sin and death. Today, we rejoice that He leads us from tears of sorrow to tears of joy. With the help of the Risen Lord, we too can let go of grief and old perspectives. Then God lets us go with the Good News.

We often here people crying. Sometimes we hear the weeping of shoeless children in Afghanistan, orphans in Tanzania, or hungry migrant workers. We hear folks crying in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and funeral homes. Yes, there is crying in our personal lives. We cannot hear though the silent weeping. Many hide their weeping because they perceive that it is improper to show emotion. Yet all of

us, from time to time, have to cry a little bit or a whole lot, as the case may be. Tears, in themselves, are not wrong. They are a God-given means to enable us to express feelings that might otherwise damage us or adversely affect our health if we did not express those feelings. However, the feelings, the things that call for our tears, are mostly unpleasant and disturbing.

We weep because of harsh words, sadness, loss of loved ones, and fear of the unknown. Some weep out of loneliness, others out of the futility of life, or a spouse's betrayal. Sometimes tears take us by surprise in moments of helplessness and regret. Sometimes we weep for joy at the birth of a child, a moment of accomplishment, or victory. Sometimes we never know who weeps and why. In our sober moments we think, "What was that all about? Was it worth all that emotion?" It seems significant to me that the Risen Christ first appeared to someone who wept. Mary Magdalene's weeping was understandable. Jesus had done so much for her. She loved him deeply because He deeply loved her.

Tradition tells us that Mary was an immoral person, but not any more sinful than any other person. Jesus cast seven demons out of her. Some folks may explain this as a mental illness. I acknowledge the legitimacy of mental illness. I also recognize the influence of demons in our world. Jesus never doubted demon possession. He dealt with it head on. I firmly believe that Jesus literally cast demons out for he had the authority to do so.

One cannot imagine the torment that went through Mary's life, her mind, her spirit, because of those demons. Jesus though set her free from their oppressive grip. He gave her purpose and meaning in life. He let her go. Jesus had loved her much and now he was dead and buried in a tomb. He had been unjustly killed.

She was there when they crucified her Lord. She watched as Joseph of Arimathea buried him. Some scholars, G. Campbell Morgan among them, believe that she stayed all through that first night beside the tomb watching to see what would happen, and only later had she gone home. Can you imagine the thoughts that must have gone through her mind as she stayed in that lonely cemetery, thinking about what had happened? Here was the one who had delivered her from demon possession, and now he was dead. Maybe she thought, "Is my life going to go back to the terrible mess it was in before I met Him?" I suspect she did not sleep much that night.

She came back the next morning, so early that it was still dark. She finds that not only was her Lord dead, but his body is missing. She did not know that her Lord had been raised from the dead. She was so overcome with grief that she could not understand what is happening even after she receives word from the angels that He was alive. The darkness of grief kept her from truly seeing. She could not grasp how near He was, even when he spoke to her. Grief can blind us to the presence of love. Sometimes it is hard to let go of grief.

Jesus said, "*Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?*" She said, "*They've taken away my Lord, and I don't know what has happened. Sir, if you can,*

tell me where he is, I will get him." Then Jesus calls her name, "*Mary,*" and Mary turns and sees that it is the Lord. She is overcome with joy. When she heard her name in a familiar voice, she let go of her grief and her grief turned to joy.

Her inclination is to grab him and hold on to him. Then we hear one of the most curious sayings of Scripture. Jesus says, "*Do not touch me.*" A better translation is, "*Do not attempt to cling to me; do not attempt to hold on to me.*" Jesus was telling Mary: Everything is changed. Our relationship will be entirely different. Before, I was in a physical body. I could be with you for only a few moments here and there. Now, I can be with you always. I can live within.

She could not understand it then. Jesus was telling her, "Don't cling to me. Don't cling to what used to be. Don't assume the old relationship we had with each other. Everything is changed now." Indeed, everything would be different. Let go of your old perspective and accept the new.

With this new reality, Jesus gives her an assignment. He says, "Go tell others. Go and spread the word that, indeed, I have risen from the dead. Make it clear to the others that now there will be fresh starts and new beginnings. In sum, Christ was the answer to Mary's grief and old perspectives. Christ is the answer to the grip of grief and old perspectives today. He is the fresh start and new beginning.

When we have lost a friend or family member, when we grieve over the loss of a job, or our sense of purpose, or security, we weep. We weep because it seems that our world is not getting better, that evil seems to overtake the good and deceit seems

overshadow truth. We weep because people are not getting better in their conduct, attitudes, and behavior. I also grieve that I am not much different, because I am still unlike my Lord. Jesus understands our grief. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He wept over the city of Jerusalem because of the course, it was pursuing. He grieved when his stepfather died. He grieved with the oppressed, over rejected children, the hungry, over a sinful humanity.

Like our Lord, many of us mourn for those whom we wish would have a living relationship with Jesus. We see church attendees who simply go through the motions. They lack though the power and peace of a relationship with Christ, because they have never met a risen Lord. They still see their religion as a matter of something out there—some moral deeds, some church attendance, some giving of money. Doctrine is important. Faith starts with understanding, with reading Scripture and understanding some of its truths. Doctrine and Scripture are important. However, doctrine did not die for you. Doctrine did not rise from the dead. Even Scripture—as much as you might memorize it, and as precious as it is—does not live within you and give you hope and strength the way His living presence can.

People in crisis find their strength not in some doctrine. They do not say, “Doctrine is with me.” They have not said, “Scripture is with me. The Apostles’ Creed is with me.” They say, “God is with me. Jesus is with me.” Come to the place where we can say with the songwriter: *“I serve a risen Savior, he’s in the world today; I know that He is living whatever foes may say. I see his hand of mercy, I hear*

his voice of cheer, and just the time I need him, he is always near. He lives, He lives Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with Me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart."

The empty tomb is our hope, our freedom. It is God's power at work in our lives. No situation is hopeless. Peter let go of his discouragement when he saw the Risen Lord. Mary let go of her grief and perceptions when she saw the Risen Lord. Then the Risen Savior let them go to tell others what they had seen and heard.

Some of you here today may be overwhelmed Maybe it is your job, or your family, or your marriage, or your financial situation—it could be anything. Maybe you are asking yourself, "Why should I keep on? What is the use? Why don't I just quit?" I can give you the reason. The tomb is empty. Let Go of your grief and perceptions! Jesus is alive today, and he is at work in our lives. Expect the unexpected. Let go in faith. Let us go and tell. 1665