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JOHN 20:11-18

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

You'll receive a postcard in the mail this week. This is the postcard. This is the one on joy. Last month it was the one on love. There are six postcards that are going into people's homes between now and the end of the year. I want to encourage you when you receive this postcard to do something with it, like wave at your neighbor and say, "See the postcard? It came from my church," or something like that so that you can maximize its use as it comes into the homes of the people around here. So I just want you to have some advanced warning that this postcard is on the way.

I also want you to know that we're going to study the book of Nehemiah next. Once we get through John, we've got a little more to go in the gospel of John. Next week I really want you to hear Tim Brown's heart, so he's going to teach next Sunday. I'll be here. I'll lead worship. But Tim is going to share, so I'm looking forward to hearing God speak through Tim next week.

But today we're going to look at the gospel of John. Today I want to look at a particular part in John 20 about the tenderness of Jesus as He works with Mary Magdalene after the resurrection in the garden there. There's so much tenderness in John 20 between Jesus and Mary. I didn't want to pass over this too quickly. I think it will be very helpful for us to look at that.

I think that as you focus in on the different character qualities of God, each one of them has a personal impact. If you focus in on the sovereignty and lordship of God and how He's in control, then it gives you the ability to trust Him in the midst of the confusion that you experience in your life. If you focus on the omnipresence of God, the fact that He's everywhere, it helps you recognize that you are not alone and you don't have to feel lonely at any point in your life situation. If you focus in on the mercy of God, then you can receive His forgiveness when you've really messed up. So each time we focus in on a heart quality of God and His characteristic, it helps you personally live life today.

So today I want to meditate and enjoy and ruminate on this idea of the tenderness of God. And we'll see it in John 20. I think you'll be impressed with the way that Jesus cares for Mary. He's just so tender with her. So let's start by reading. Let me read the passage to you. Would you stand with me? Open your Bibles to John 20 starting in verse 11. I'll read this passage and then we'll delve a little bit more into it. But I want you to feel what Jesus is doing here with Mary as we get started.

It says here – *Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.*

*They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.*

*He asked her, "Woman, why are you 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."
Jesus said to her, "Mary."*

*She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").
Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

Mary 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 may be seated.

I'm a dad and I'm a grandfather and I really enjoy spending time with my kids and my grandchildren. I was playing a game with my grandchildren a few weeks back and I have a grandson who loves to play games, but hates to lose. We were going to play the game of Risk, a game that requires a lot of strategy and he's just learning how to play the game. So there's a point in the game where he's losing and I say, "Look. I'm just going to tell you. I'm going to beat you. I'm going to beat you and I'm going to teach you how to play by beating you really bad." In our family when I was growing up, we had a phrase: Beat the pants off you. I don't know if that's a good thing to say or not, but that's what we said. I'm going to beat the pants off you.

So when it became clear that he was losing the game, he got upset and he ran to his room where he stayed a little bit. So after a few minutes, I went up to his room and I sat there with him on his bed and I hugged him and I cared for him and I comforted him. I just comforted him and I told him, "Look. Come on down. Let's play the game. I'm going to beat you really bad and you're going to learn some really good things how to play this game." So he did. He came down and we played the game and I beat him really bad. Sometimes we let kids win, sometimes we beat them. And in this case I beat him because I wanted to teach him how to play the strategy. I told him what he was doing, but there was a sense of comfort that he really needed in that moment.

I think there's sometimes in our lives that's the part of God we really need. God, I need your comfort. I need your compassion. I need your tenderness. I need your gentleness.

So today I want to look at the story between Jesus and Mary here from two different perspectives. On the one side I want to look at it from Jesus' perspective so that we can grow in

our gentleness. I think we can learn from Jesus as a model how we can be more gentle in our own lives. I think it's a really good quality for all of us to have. So we'll look at it from Jesus' perspective, then we'll look at it from Mary's perspective. Because sometimes I think it's hard to receive comfort and we all need to be able to put ourselves in that place where we can receive and appreciate the gentleness of God in our lives.

So to start, before we go right back in the passage I want to show you a beautiful verse from the Old Testament, also from Isaiah, one of the verses or passages or books that Jack referred to. Isaiah 40:11 says – *He tends his flock like a shepherd* (referring to God). Isaiah wants to communicate as a prophet. He's a prophet who often had to say hard words to the people, but he wanted to communicate to them that God has a heart for you. So he says – *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart (oh I love that); he gently leads those that have young.*

I like the picture of holding them close to His heart. It reminds me in the Old Testament when God designed the clothing that the high priest would wear, he designed this ephod it was called. It was like a smock thing that he would put over and it had twelve stones on it. He says these words in Exodus 28: I want you to have these twelve stones, one for each of the tribes because when you go into the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place, I want you to have these tribes, these people over your heart. Also there was the Urim and Thummim. They were like dice of some kind. There was a pocket in the ephod that they would put there because I want you to have the decision-making for the people over your heart. What a beautiful picture.

It's especially valuable when we think of now in the New Testament that the curtain has been opened up, torn in two so we don't have to go to a priest now to confess our sins. We can go directly to the Father and we can bring to Him the cares, not only our cares, but we can bring to Him the cares of those we love over our hearts in before Him because He cares about us and He loves us and there's a compassion there. We can also bring our decision-making straight to the Father because He cares about the decisions that we're making. Is this compassion that God has that we need to be in touch with in our own personal lives.

There's a Greek word. I suppose this is my favorite Greek word. It's the Greek word *splagchna* which is translated compassion in the New Testament. I like it just because I like to say it. *Splagchna*. Isn't that a fun word to say? *Splagchna*. So I like that word. It just is translated compassion. It's used often of Jesus who had compassion. For example it's used when Jesus saw the crowds all coming. When the crowds all started to come to the disciples and Jesus, I think the tension level increased among all of them. They're feeling a little bit, "Uh oh. What's going to happen now? What are we going to do now?" But the Bible says that Jesus had compassion on the crowds and taught them. His teaching came out of a sense of compassion for them. Oh I need that.

I especially like the Sundays in which during the week I've been able to prepare the message during the week early in the week and then as I'm living it I come alongside someone who just embodies this need for this truth. It's helpful for me because then on Sunday when I get up to speak it's not like a sterile truth where I'm just dishing out information. But it comes from this sense of while there's real people who have real needs who have the compassion of God. So

when Jesus speaks to the people, it teaches them out of compassion, it's just a great model for me. I want to be that kind of person that has such a sense of compassion that I'm not beating people over the head with the truth of God, but recognizing that God does that with such a great sense of compassion.

There's another story that uses the word *splagchna* about Jesus. Jesus was leaving Jericho, heading up to Jerusalem. It was party time because the feast was about to happen. They would travel up to Jerusalem regularly, singing songs along the way, the Songs of Ascent we have in the Bible. And as they're leaving Jericho and coming out of the city, there are two guys over there, hecklers, as it were, on the side heckling and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And the crowd is saying, "Be quiet. We're having a party. Don't do that. Don't talk out." And the Bible says Jesus had compassion on them. He went over there and He touched them and He healed them. He had compassion. His actions were born out of this sense of love and comfort, not out of duty.

There's another story of a funeral that was going on and Jesus came to this funeral. He appeared as the funeral was going on and there was a woman who had lost her son. Painful, I'm sure, because she was also a widow. She lost her husband and now she lost her son. The Bible says that Jesus had compassion on her and He acted out of that compassion and raised this little boy from the dead. The compassion of Jesus. I think we all want to be able to have the compassion that Jesus has with Mary in the garden. This kind of gentleness. This gentleness that turns into graciousness in our lives. It's something that we need to model, we need to exercise.

So if we were to define the gentleness, how would we define it? You can write this down. Here's how you define gentleness. It just takes a little bit more time. It takes just a little bit more time to open the door and let somebody else go first. It takes just a little bit more time to let someone cut in traffic in front of you. It takes just a little bit more time to listen to someone when you already know what they're going to say and you want to cut them off. Just a little bit more time. Gentleness.

If we were to look at the concept of graciousness, I think we're going to see that it's made up of three qualities. These three qualities are kindness (the ability to give to other people, to think of them), and the idea of gentleness (which has to do with the approach that we use with that person), and the third one is patience (which has to do with timing). So this idea of graciousness is really important, I think. As we're trying to develop graciousness, you're trying to break it down, these are the three qualities that we're going to work on.

The beautiful thing about this diagram is that those three words (kindness, patience, and gentleness) are all found in Galatians 5:22 in the fruit of the Spirit. You see as we become more Holy Spirit-filled, as we allow the Holy Spirit to do something in us, He builds into us kindness, He builds into us gentleness and patience and it turns us into more of a gracious person. Just a little bit more time.

Let's look at how Jesus handles Mary in the story. Notice first of all it says right in the front – *Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying*. The word *crying* is that her emotion could not be contained. You know how it is if you cry. That you just can't contain the emotion. It just comes

out in that crying. I think that sometimes we feel uncomfortable if someone else is crying. We don't know what to do and we might feel anxious about that. I think that it's really important for us to realize that when someone cries, they're opening up their heart. It's a tender moment that the crying is an expression of something that is going on inside of their heart.

So Jesus says in verse 15 as He's caring for her, "*Woman, why are you crying?*" By the way that's a good question to ask if someone is crying. First of all you want to be quiet. If someone is crying, just be quiet. You do not have to say anything. You just let them cry and be there. That's sufficient, that's okay. Just be there. But then you can ask a question like, "Why are you crying? What's going on? It sounds like this is really hard for you." "*Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*" I like the way Jesus is taking time with her. It just takes a little bit more time to be gracious with someone.

My friend Ed this week was telling me a story. See Ed works with families all over the country like I do and he also works with the young people in that family. He's working with a fifteen year old boy. He's trying to help that young man know how to work with his parents and he's helping the parents know how to work with this young man. Neither way it's easy.

So one morning Ed says he got a text from the young man that says, "Ed, I need your help."

Ed says, "Okay, what's going on?"

"My mom is being a pain."

"What do you mean? Tell me about it."

"She told me to get a haircut."

He says, "Well what did you tell her?"

I told her, "No."

Ed says, "Well did that work?"

"No, not really."

Ed continued in the dialogue to help this young man in this way. This is a common problem among young people is that they believe that if they don't say no, if they're defiant then they can stand up for themselves. But if they're not defiant then it means they've got to lay down and they've got to give up all their rights or they become a doormat and they give up their identity. There's this identity problem on this one side and there's this defiance on the other.

Ed is saying there's a lot of stuff in between here. Let me give you an idea. Let me talk to you about the wise appeal. The wise appeal is a way for a young person to be gracious with parents. He went through the formula that we use. "I understand that you want me to get a haircut because..." "I have a problem with that because..." "So could I please..." and try to compromise. They're texting this back and forth. So he says to the young man, "What do you think of that?"

He says, "I think I'll try that."

Do you see what happened? In that dialogue what had happened was that this young man had discovered that there's something in the middle called graciousness that's different than defiance and laying down all your rights. There's something in the middle. There's being gracious. I just find that Jesus in this story is being so careful and gracious with Mary.

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." Now the interesting thing about this is that Jesus listens to her. He takes time with her. It takes extra time. It's particularly interesting to me because I know that Jesus has a to-do list. He has appointments later in the day. He's got an appointment on the road with two guys. He's going to walk seven miles to Emmaus with these two guys and eat dinner with them. Then He has an appointment later in the evening back in Jerusalem coming through the walls (we'll talk about this in a few weeks) and meet with His disciples. He's got things to do. Important things to do. And now He's listening to this woman tell about her question and so on? I just really like the way Jesus cares for her. I'm just so impressed with this.

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." He continues to listen. There seems to be a pause then in the moment. And then He says, *"Mary."* I was trying to figure out what kind of inflection to put there. Do you think He's saying "Mary" as if "Mary! You know I'm calling you out here. Mary, I'm angry with you." Or "Mary, would you get over this? Quit your crying." No, I think He wanted to say the words in a way that she would look up and go [gasp]. You can just imagine the surprise that she felt. *"Mary."*

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). It's this nice word that describes their relationship together.

I think we want to learn how to be compassionate and gentle. I think it's a message that we all need to hear because there's this place in the middle that we can all do better in to be more gentle. But I think we also need to learn how to receive the gentleness of God.

The danger here is this: If you only know God as the righteous king or the Savior of the world, and you don't know Him as the gentle shepherd, then there's a tendency when you start to feel in pain or to feel disappointed or sad or discouraged to pull away from God because you don't know Him that way. And then you start to feel distant from God when things aren't going too well when that's the time when you need to feel closest to Him. There's this special place in God's heart that we need to get to know that by receiving the comfort of God and receiving the gentleness that God has for us. We need that. The challenge though is that in order to receive comfort, you have to have some weakness or acknowledge that weakness.

There are some people who just don't like to cry. You don't like to cry? That's fine. But there's a challenge here. You have to somehow be able to admit the weakness that I need something. I need somebody outside of myself that allows me to experience God in a personal gentle way. Sometimes we're like Peter who says, "Don't wash my feet! I don't have any need for that!" So we find ourselves moving away from the Lord when we should be moving close to Him.

Passage after passage in scripture talks about how God's comfort is waiting for us and we need to receive it into our lives. We could talk about 2 Corinthians 1 which talks about God comforts us so we can comfort other people. We could talk about Psalm 23 and the shepherd passage there about comforting. But I'm just going to go to another one. There's many of them.

I just want to take you to this one in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus says – *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”* You know when we’re weak and we’re struggling and we need rest, there’s a learning process that’s available for us. *“Take my yoke upon me and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* I think our souls need rest and Jesus is saying, “Come and I’m going to provide that with you. You don’t have to be afraid. I’m not going to jostle you around. I’m gentle.” There’s this gentleness of Jesus that we need to understand.

How do we receive the comfort of God? Well we can do what Jack does (which is great) where he pulls out scripture. I don’t know if you heard him, but each time he read a verse, he would stop in those verses and he would almost tell us “this is what I need in my life” as he’s just reading those verses. Those verses have become his verses and God is comforting him through the verses of scripture.

Sometimes the comfort of God comes just through our prayer time. Not just speaking to God and sharing our heart, yes, but also listening to Him. Maybe there ought to be a quiet time in our prayer where we’re just allowing God to speak back to us in our hearts.

Sometimes that comes just through the Holy Spirit. You know the Holy Spirit is the comforter, as described in John 16. The Holy Spirit comforts us in our lives. Sometimes we experience the comfort in the fellowship as we get together with friends and we spend time together as a church. There is comfort that is experienced in the midst of that. We need to be able to receive the comfort of God. There’s always a challenge when we are finding ourselves in pain that we start to retract. We start to bring ourselves more in and in and build walls around us and start to isolate ourselves in ways that remove us from the source of strength. And that’s why I think Jesus does what He does next in John 20.

He says – *“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* I’m going to send you on a mission.

I would suggest that ministry, working with other people, getting out there is part of our ticket to healing inside of our hearts. Jesus is going to send Mary on a mission and that mission is get outside yourself and go help some other people. Let them know what’s going on. And so she does.

Notice what she says. Five words. See those words? *“I have seen the Lord!”* It’s only two Greek words, but it’s five words in English. *“I have seen the Lord!”* That was her message. That’s all she needed to say. She didn’t have to have a lot of degrees. She didn’t have to have a lot of training, go to a class. All she needed to say was, *“I have seen the Lord.”*

Do you want to open dialogue with others? Tomorrow at work you just say to everybody, “I have seen the Lord.” That’s going to open the door for more dialogue, more questions. If you say to people in your neighborhood, “Hey, I’ve seen the Lord,” they’re going to listen to whatever you say next. All you have to do is use the same words that Mary used. “I have seen the Lord.”

They're going, "Come on. Tell me what you're talking about." So notice – *And she told them that he had said these things to her.* Once she opened the door with those words, "I have seen the Lord," then she had a lot more to say and she could describe the specifics of how God...

Have you seen the Lord? You can say to someone tomorrow, "I've seen the Lord" And they're going to say, "What are you talking about?" "Well yesterday at church this guy at church stood up. He has cancer and he was sharing from the Bible and I saw the Lord in his heart." "Yesterday we sang that worship song *Blessed Assurance* and when we did, I saw the Lord." "Yesterday we opened the Bible and it talked about Jesus being compassionate and when I saw that, I saw the Lord." So you have a testimony. It doesn't have to be elaborate, you just have to say to people, "I have seen the Lord." That's what Mary did and God used that in her whole experience to move her on and to get her going in her life. And then she had a lot to say to fill in the gaps after that.

I'm convinced that God has some important things He wants us to learn in this area of the middle. This gentleness, this graciousness that we can develop. There's a lot of people who are pretty black and white. Oh I can't do that or I'm going to feel like this. So they feel like they're going to be trodden down if they don't stand up and be harsh or mean. But there's a big place in the middle and that place is called graciousness or gentleness. So today we get to look at Jesus and His model of gentleness and graciousness is something that we can implement in our own lives.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we thank you for your great love. We thank you for the way you care for us, you love us, you have compassion. Lord, we need forgiveness today. We need healing. We need comfort. We thank you that we can come to you as our gentle God and Father. Continue to work in our hearts to heal us, to bring us to that place of rest in our hearts. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.