

# WHO ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

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## Great Questions (Part 9)

Text: John 20:10-18

### We're Always Looking

The Voice that spoke in the early dawn of that first Easter Sunday asked one of the greatest questions that can ever be posed to any of us: **"Who is it you are looking for?"** It is a particularly great question because it reminds us that the most important issue of life isn't about a What, a Where, or a Why; it is about a Who. That's not to say these other dimensions of life aren't very significant. They are. We naturally care quite a bit about what we do, or where we live, or why we're here, but these concerns pale in comparison to the question: With whom will you share these things? From the school playground to the marketplace, from quantum physics to the halls of congress, life we eventually discover, is ultimately about relationships. It's about the Who.

And so, not surprisingly, we go looking. Even before our eyes are open we look for someone who loves us – someone who cares enough to express love in the only way we recognize it at first – by providing the basic nurture we need. Over time, we learn to look for higher forms of love too – for someone who will accept us when we're dirty, and be there when we come home, and pick us up when we fall, and share with us their heart and hopes as well. Do you think we ever stop looking for someone like that -- for a LOVER in the broadest and best sense of that word?

From our earliest days, we also look for someone from whom we can learn. This is why children imitate their parents and teens look to upperclassmen and coaches. It is why young adults attach themselves to celebrated figures or people a bit farther along life's path. In the middle of life we might look to a golf pro, to Rachel Ray or Martha, to the Donald, to Oprah, or to some much less-known mentor who can show us what it looks like to live an effective, full or significant life. Even as older adults we're still learning. Now we start looking to kids again to help us remember how to laugh and marvel, to be dependent and to play. We're always looking for a TEACHER.

I think of the story of the hillbilly family who wanted to learn about life in the big city. Checking in to a ritzy hotel, they stood in amazement before a bank of shiny doors, never having seen an elevator before. Just then, an old lady hobbled up, pressed a button, and went inside. The elevator doors slid closed. A few moments later, they heard this sweet-sounding bing. The doors slid open and out walked a sexy young woman in high heels. Transfixed upon her, the hillbilly dad, pats his boy Jethro's arm and says, "Son, go get your mother."

Sooner or later in life, we discover that transformations like this are not all that easy – especially the ones that go more than skin deep. And so we look for someone with

power to help us or the people we know really change. Maybe Dr. Phil can help my love-life or Tony Robbins will jumpstart my career. Perhaps the next political candidate will really bring the changes needed in government. Maybe that diet-guru will make a difference, or that financial advisor will straighten things out. We're always looking for a LIFE-CHANGER.

The point I'm trying to make is that whether we're younger or older, rich or poor, black or white, religious or not, we ALL go looking in life for FOUR kinds of people. We look for a Lover, a Teacher, a Life-Changer and, one more. We also look for someone to give us assurance that this precious life will go on. This past week I was very glad to see those homeland security officers doing their job at the airport. Many other weeks, I'm in the hospital with somebody very glad to see that skilled physician walking in the room. I talked just yesterday with someone looking for an expert lawyer to help her get out of an unthinkable mess. At some point, all of us are looking for a DELIVERER.

This world is constantly trying to get us to focus our attention on the what and the where and the why of things. But in our clearest moments – in the time of serious need, in the day of great accomplishment, at that moment when we're standing by the graveside, we know the truth don't we? Life – at least life with a capital "L" – is *all about the WHO.*

### **Finding and Being Found By Jesus**

It certainly was for the woman we meet in John's gospel on Easter morning. Mary Magdalene had been on the hunt all of her life. She'd been looking for someone who truly loved her – not because she was pretty or knew how to perform in bed or because he didn't yet know her secrets. Mary was looking for a LOVER in the broadest and best sense – someone who saw her value as a person in spite of what she'd been and done or hadn't; someone who believed in her potential as a human being; someone who was a lover of her soul. And that Who had turned out to be Him. Jesus had loved Mary. He didn't use or abuse her. He neither condemned her for her sins nor condoned her remaining stuck in them. Jesus showed Mary the love of a God who is neither a sour-pussed judge or a stupidly indulgent grandfather. He helped her get to know a God who loves people too much not to meet them exactly as they are and too much to leave them that way.

Jesus had been an amazing TEACHER to Mary. He taught her that the most influential power in this world isn't control, but servanthood. He taught her that passions like greed, anger, or lust don't get you what you want, they just make you thirstier for it. He taught her that everything we have in this life is a sacred trust to be used for the purposes of God. Jesus taught Mary that a proud, resentful heart might look tough, but it was nowhere near as strong as a humble, forgiving heart. Mary couldn't get enough of Jesus' message and modeling. That's why she wouldn't leave him, even when they pinned him to a Cross. Jesus taught more about living in his three hours of

dying than most educators, philosophers, and celebrities do in an entire lifetime. If people could learn the lessons Jesus taught, this world would change for the better.

I think of the story of the longshoreman who became a follower of Jesus and then was mocked by his buddies for the way he'd stopped carousing and swearing. "That Jesus stuff is all a joke, Tommy," they said. "It's all ancient history or make-believe. You don't really think there was a man who could turn water into wine, do you, Tommy?" "I wasn't there," said Tommy. "All I can tell you is that at my house, he's turned beer into furniture and bad marriage into a good one." Mary could have told plenty of stories like that. She knew Jesus was a LIFE-CHANGER. She was no longer a prostitute. She felt a gracious power moving in her that had simply not been there before. Every one in Jesus' inner circle had changed, except maybe for Judas. Sure, Peter had faltered under pressure. James and Andrew had run when the cops came. But, if you'd known them before, you'd be amazed how much better these people had all become simply by walking with Jesus.

The only thing Mary did not yet know was what she was about to discover in that graveyard on Easter morning. Mary had come to the garden tomb before dawn to honor Jesus, to get as close to his memory as she could. When she saw that the tomb was empty, all she could conclude was that someone had stolen the body of Jesus. The last remnant of him was now gone forever and the mere thought of this sent her into sobs of inconsolable grief. Turning from the entrance, Mary saw the figure of a man in the darkness that she took to be the graveyard gardener. **"Who is it you are looking for?"** the Voice asked. And the passionate intensity with which she answers this question makes it clear that she feels that she has lost forever the great love, the great teacher, the great life-changing power of her life, yet still hopes there might be some way get at least a reminder of it back.

And then the Voice spoke her name. He spoke it with all the feeling of Someone who truly loves your soul, who longs to be your teacher, who has in himself the power to change your life for the good. **"Mary,"** he said. And in that state of utter shock and wonder that always accompanies an encounter with the Transcendent, Magdalene suddenly knew that she was standing in the presence of JESUS. This could only mean one thing. Jesus was not just a very loving man, not just a brilliant teacher, not just a passionate change-maker. Jesus had to be what he had coyly claimed to be all throughout the time he'd walked with them. Jesus was truly God -- the one whom the Old Testament called the great DELIVERER.

### **Who Is It?**

At Easter, Jesus takes off those relativizing robes with which all the sentimental stories have tried to clothe him and he shows us WHO he really is. Jesus shows us that he is the great Life at the root of all life. He is the rising grace that sin cannot overcome, evil cannot conquer, and death cannot contain. He demonstrates that his enemies can't

destroy him, the thoughtless crowd cannot bury him, and even his fickle followers cannot elude him for long. Jesus comes to us, as he came to Mary, revealing himself as that perfect love, that absolute truth, that life-changing power, that sin and death-defying God of deliverance that each of us and our whole world needs now more than ever.

Here's what I want to ask you as we conclude today: What if all those longings you and I have had since we were kids for a love that never failed us were simply preparing us to enter into the arms of a perfect love? What if turned out that there were absolute truths that governed human relationships every bit as reliably as the laws of physics or chemistry and Someone who could teach those truths to us? What if there were a power that could actually change our character where will-power had failed, so that we finally became capable of overcoming our addictions, and resolving our conflicts, and crafting solutions to the pressing problems of our age? What if all it took to have assurance that your life would go on beyond the grave was to give up the notion that you're going to save yourself, humbly confess your sins to God, and put your hands into the hand of the great Deliverer? Would you want to miss this? I don't.

Life is not finally about the what, where, or why. It's about the WHO. So who are you looking for? Who's going to give you the love, truth, power, and deliverance all of us need? For this is the good news I proclaim this Easter morning: With every bit as much hope and care as he felt for Mary, the ultimate WHO is looking for YOU.

Please pray with me...

*Great God, Lord of Life, fill us with your love that never fails. Teach us your truth that sets us free. Change us by the power of your Holy Spirit. Deliver us from the bonds of sin and death for that glorious life for which we were created and you came to earth in Jesus Christ. And let all who sincerely join me in this prayer, say with one voice: "Hallelujah! Amen!"*