

Insurmountable Faith  
John 20:1-18

There is a line in the movie, *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, that states, "Faith is: believing in the things you can't see." This entire movie is focused on proving that a little old man is Santa. In the movie, Susan, the daughter of a Macy's store manager, asks Santa for a specific house for Christmas as proof that this nice old man is really Santa. When Santa doesn't deliver, her unbelief is confirmed. On Christmas day, Santa makes one more attempt at granting her Christmas wish by giving specific directions of a preferred route home for Susan and her Mother. Susan climbs into the front seat of the car half-heatedly repeating the words, "I believe, I believe." Suddenly, Susan sees the house that she asked Santa for Christmas. Full of excitement, she shouts for her mother to stop. Well, you know how the story ends. Susan finally realizes the truth by saying, "I believe! I really do!" Her voice and entire being lights up with her new found faith and belief.

I'm sure you're wondering what *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, a Christmas story, has to do with Easter Sunday. Two things: faith and belief. In the movie, these two words were challenged, wrestled with, and finally understood as the movie comes to a close. In our Christian lives, we also

share the same struggles and challenges when we discuss issues surrounding our faith and belief in Christ's resurrection. Today, the only proof we have that Christ rose from the dead is what we read in the scriptures. No one here has seen physical proof of the risen Christ, have you? In fact, according to this sacred text, no one, not even the disciples, was present when Jesus rose from the dead. The Disciples only found the remains of an empty tomb. Let's look at the story again as it is told in the Gospel of John.

It is early in the morning and approximately thirty hours has lapsed since Jesus had been taken down from the cross and laid in the stone tomb. Mary Magdalene arrives with eyes swelled from her tears of grief. Jesus had been the one person who loved her like she had been loved as a child. He had given her a second chance at life by helping people look past the "irregularities" of her life. Now, her beloved friend is gone. Mary wants to be close to Jesus' spirit before it leaves for good so she decides to walk to the garden. Arriving at the tomb, Mary is taken aback at seeing no stone sealing the entrance. Immediately, she assumes grave robbers have stolen Jesus' body or worse, the Jews have taken Jesus some place as another mean attack against Jesus and his followers. Quickly, turning on

her heals, she runs to get help from Peter and the other disciple. John records both men running to the scene, the other disciple arriving first, waits for Peter to enter and see what's inside. Following after Peter, the other disciple also enters the tomb. According to John, the other disciple leaves seeing and believing. What did he see? What did he believe?

Mary is left alone in the garden as the disciples return to the upper room. Bravely, she walks to the tomb, peaking inside with tears streaming down her face. She notices two angels sitting where Jesus' body should have been. They ask her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Mary, even after seeing the empty tomb and the angels, still holds on to her belief that someone has stolen Jesus' body. Why can she not believe? As she turns to leave the tomb, Mary runs into Jesus and believes him to be the gardener. Again she is asked, "Why are you crying?" Her focus is on searching for Jesus' lifeless body instead of seeing and believing that Jesus is alive.

Mary holds on to her previous understanding of death as the ultimate finality, after which nothing more happens. However, Jesus' resurrection gives breath to the concept of eternal life with God. There *is* more that happens when earthly death arrives. Christ's resurrection conquers death

not only for him but for you and me as well. At the supper, Jesus washed the disciples' feet as a means of hospitality welcoming them into God's heavenly home. Upon returning home, Jesus stands at the door to God's house waiting to welcome all whose eyes have been opened to the truth. John tells the readers that Jesus' time on earth provides us with the way, the truth, and life of how to find eternity with God. Can you believe? At this point, Mary might respond to this question the same half-hearted way as Susan by saying, "I believe. I believe."

Then, Mary hears Jesus' soft voice speak her name. Her heart, mind, and soul are opened to seeing and believing that the man standing in front of her really is Jesus. He is not dead, but alive! Suddenly, Mary's voice and entire being is filled with the excitement of true belief, "I believe! I really do!" Jesus has returned to lead them once again. However, there is a warning that comes with Jesus' appearance. "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father ...." Jesus does not want to give Mary the wrong impression. He is not here to stay; soon he will be returning home to God. Jesus' appearance guides Mary in transferring her faith and trust from Jesus, the human who stands before her, to God.

The second part of Jesus' request is for Mary to put the tears behind her and to go tell the disciples what she has witnessed. Mary becomes the first evangelist to speak as an eyewitness about seeing Jesus alive, resurrected like Lazarus. Jesus sends Mary to share with the disciples a very clear message, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Where Jesus is going we too will someday go; but first we have some work to do. We are the Mary's of the world who are to go and tell others that we have seen Christ face to face. Christ is still alive today; this very moment we can see and hear God's voice. This isn't just a story, a hope, a wish that came true. Christ still appears to us through the advocate of the Holy Spirit.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus remained on earth fifty days before his ascension. He appeared to several people who were in need of reconnecting their hearts, minds, and souls with God. The trauma of Jesus' death left many struggling with what to believe. They were hurt by the leaders of the church and what they represented. They were confused about what the church had become and what it professed. Jesus reached out to those whose faith had been challenged and compromised. He

wanted to show them that people make mistakes, but in the midst of turmoil, God's truth shows them the way.

Is there someone you know who's struggling with what to believe? In the next fifty days we have the opportunity to reach out with the news that CHRIST IS ALIVE! What has happened is in the past. Life has changed. Now it is time to move forward. Mary Magdalene ran to the disciples saying, "I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!" What news will you share with the world when you leave today? Amen.