

Focus - in a Distracting Land

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

John 20:1-18 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes. ¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary

Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned ... (John 20:16)

What a beautiful picture of faith! God speaks, and because of what we hear we are turned back to him... Focused! Refocused in the midst of our distracting lives. The promise is not that we will lose the distractions. The promise is that Christ will keep our focus on Him, with his loving and forgiving, and knowing voice.

Where do you hear that voice? From whom? Where is it that God is most real for you? God has promised you a family, a group of people through which you are most likely to hear His voice. A church family. God has promised you a preacher. Not necessarily the family pastor, who will make God real for you. Who is the preacher in your life right now who calls you by name and because of the love and trust in that voice you turn, recognize, awaken, refocus... Things are brought back into focus in the midst of life’s distractions.

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We have used some imagery from C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia* children’s books to talk about the Cross this Lenten season. One of the images that helped me hear God’s voice this season was the image of Edmund staring at Aslan (the God figure), the sinner staring at his savior, as his worst sin comes to roost.

C.S. Lewis the theologian and artist with words, paints the picture of faith. While everyone else is staring at Edmund and his mistakes, Edmund is not struck with guilt or pain, but

simply marvels as He looks at his savior. Edmund has been forgiven and he trusts that the weight and consequences of his sin are now in God's hands.

I invite you to be a part of our Movie Night – The older elementary kids will be watching the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. April 20th, movies for all ages. You might consider reading that easter story with the kids this season.

I also invite you to be a part of our 2-worship series coming up after Easter Sunday. We will take the first 3 weeks in April to talk about the resurrection. Really that is a foreign word. Many young people might think of a phoenix rising from the ashes before they make any connection with an empty tomb. What are we talking about when we say Jesus rose from the dead? What does that even mean?

The meaning of the Cross has always been clear to me. And I think it is to a secular world as well. It is a symbol of forgiveness. But why the resurrection? I know I need forgiveness; I am not as easily excited about the change that is required in order for me to have new life. Join us and invite others for a deeper dive into the power of the resurrection to empty us of ourselves and fill us with the presence of God for others.

Our second series to wrap up the school year we are calling *Adventure*. What is it about the end of school that feels like an adventure? The family vacations, the warmth, the time with family. I invite you to make sharing worship as a family, a mini vacation - a part of your families adventures this Summer.

What I trust God is showing you and yours this Easter morning is that same picture of trust and focus found on the face of Mary at the empty tomb. The same picture of trust that C.S. Lewis paints on the face of Edmund.

But in order to get there we need to face the expectations we brought with us into worship on this day. Do you really think God is going to show up for you this day?

Let me tell you if you are too busy and distracted for that thought to even cross your mind you are not the only one.

In fact the Bible tells us clearly who we are in this relationship with God. We are the doubter being awakened again and again to the very presence of God that has been there the whole time.

We are like Mary who hears God's voice, but does not recognize who it is until Jesus calls her by name. We are doubters still searching for a dead body that the gardener stole when Jesus said quite clearly to all of the disciples, multiple times. I must die for you and in 3 days I will rise again. To the same group of people who had already experienced, seen, heard the resurrection of Lazarus. And yet Mary and the disciples come to the tomb expecting the same old cause and effect world that we all live in.

In the world you and I live our daily lives in, people do not rise from the dead. Literally or figuratively. Our expectations are very different. We expect the worst in each other. Even at our best we expect that others in our life will be selfish or at the very least self-focused.

We do not expect New Life. To this day, and for the rest of our lives, we will stand in awe when see someone set themselves

aside for the sake of another much less a stranger. We are all children competing for the parent's attention. That is our expectation of life.

We live our lives and act as if God is dead. And I am not just talking about the secular, scholastic, humanist movement that is trying to build a world view where God does not matter. I am talking about you and me. We are like those closest to God. We are like Mary and Peter and John expecting death when we have been promised new life. Expecting God is dead when he is very much alive.

Let me tell you this morning God is very much alive, very real. With out him the flowers would not bloom, and the birds would not chirp. Without God the sun does not shine, the water does not flow and there is no air to breath. Without God we would all be left to our own devices and this world truly would be a selfish and chaotic mess.

The reality is that should shock us every day just as Shocked as Mary was when she heard her name. ... The reality that should shock us everyday is that in the midst of how lost and distracted we are in life, for some reason we (from time to time) choose to put others before ourselves. And others do the same. And it is this one simple reality that keeps, and continues to keep humanity from spinning out of control.

It isn't our good laws and leaders and role models keeping us in check that makes the whole thing work. It is the presence of a family and a preacher that speaks into our lives setting us free from the distractions. It is a true and real and living God speaking into lives that keeps this world from the brink of destruction... creating instead something quite beautiful.

God is alive! God is real! And God knows your name!

I invite you to take a moment with me now and just close your eyes. Surrender to the presence that has been there the whole time. Listen for that still small voice that knows you by name ... close your eyes, what do you hear?

... Child, my child (insert name)... I know you and I have loved you from the very beginning. You are mine! With you I am well pleased!

