

# 6.18.23 Sermon

## Acceptance | John 20:1-9

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

acceptance, feelings, jesus, journey, standing, events, thoughts, life, mary, talk, disciple, tomb, put, peace, called, god, cloud, story, invite, feel

### **SPEAKERS**

**Rev. Dr. Tracy L. Saletta**

Hey, I just want y'all to see that for 35 years I've been preaching, 26 of them in this space.

And I come with organized notes. They are very clear, but let's be honest, they're not concise.

But they're concise for me. I just make them stretch longer. And you know, all done. Here's my sermon. Today, I'm preaching from notes, so we're gonna see what happens. So, if suddenly I stop and stare at you, it's because I have lost my train of thought. So, we're just going to take the journey this morning. But I have to say this when I saw Chris come up with this,

You know, Chris is here. And Chris, how many years have you been cleaning this church?

Like, like eons?

12?15? He's been, he's been cleaning the church a long time. Give him a hand. Well, when Chris cleans, he comes in with these big, you know, ear things, music, and he plays headphones. Thank you, God. See, it's already happening. Help me, friend, just tell me, throw words out, John.

So, inevitably, what happens is I'll come in. And I came in yesterday because I needed to see how this worked with this. So, I came into practice here and worked it through. So just because you see notes, don't think I, you know, didn't prepare. But so, I came into practice while Chris is cleaning in the other room, and I walk in, and then I just stand quietly.

And he's like, you know, doing garbage. And he's like, I'll show you what the back is like.

Right, and as he's doing garbage, and I'm standing right behind him, silently, scarily just waiting for him. It's one of the pleasures in my life.

And he does, inevitably, he'll turn around. Wow. And I last for five minutes. It's a beautiful, beautiful relationship we have, Chris. I really appreciate it.

So, I preached on this text, John 20, at Easter. And I preached on it because, of course, Jesus was risen, but it's one of my favorite texts. Well, apparently, I also assigned it to myself again when we got here. But, you know, I want you to hear the paradigm that I come with. And I can hear myself clicking

The paradigm that I come with, when I'm coming to the Bible, I believe that the Bible speaks to us about God. We've all been brought up on that, we understand that.

But I also believe that it speaks to us about us, about humanity, about who we are. And I think sometimes we miss that point. We're so busy looking at what we should and shouldn't do, what sin is, what it isn't, who God is, what God expects of us, all this, that we forget to look into it and go, wait. I am they and they are me. And they are we and recognize us. And our ridiculousness and our beauty as humans. So today, as I'm reading this verse, we're going to talk about us as humans and how we show up in this text. So, I'm going to read it, and then I'm going to pause and write.

So, John 20, it is after the crucifixion. And Mary and the disciples are showing up at the tomb. And it says, early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So, she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one that Jesus loved. It drives me bananas. Why does he say that? And said,

it's, see, that's so human, like, why didn't he just say "I"? Or in John, like, what's up with the ego there, John, anyway? And he said, they've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him. So, I'm going to start this morning by saying,

In our lives, we encounter events.

Right.

These events can be anything. This one is a traumatic event. So, it can be trauma. Or it can be events like a car accident, a new job, a new baby, marriage, divorce. It can be any event in our life. We encounter these events, and we don't know.

We don't know what's going on. We don't know what's happening. Even in things that are wonderful and good in our lives, there are these parts and areas that we're unsure of. You wait to have a child, and nine months come, and then you bring that baby home. And with Tony and I, we stared at the baby and went, like, now what?

Like, what do we do? How do you do this? Or you buy a new house, and you enter the house and you have a chair because you lived in an apartment before? And you're like, what? How are we going to do this now? So, these events hit, or a trauma hits, and you're never going to be the same again. And you go, now how do I do my life? Now what happens? So, we have these moments, and we don't know. And it's the unknown.

And again, even in beautiful things, there is an aspect of the unknown. So, let's keep reading.

So, Peter, and the other disciple started for the tomb, both for running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

There it is, again, he bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there. But he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived, and went in to the two. So, the first one here,

when things happen in our life, and we get an emotional reaction, again, trauma, or something good and event. What happens to us sometimes is we don't go in.

We don't want to experience the feelings. We see the feelings, we see the moment. But we peek in at it and we go not touching it. I'm going to pretend like these feelings aren't happening. I'm going to pretend like they're not there. We just don't go in.

But Peter, he comes running. And then he goes in. And he takes a little gander and investigates, and he sees the linen line there, the burial cloth that have been around Jesus's head, the fact that the cloth was folded, separate from the linen. So, he's looking, and he's taken a touch in there. And then the other disciple also goes in. So where did this come from?

It's like, whoa, so the other disciple goes in. Right? We go in.

And then the first disciple that didn't go in went in. So sometimes the way to go into these events or these feelings that we acknowledge and that we see is you bring a buddy, you should find a friend who will go in with you, and who will help you deal with whatever it is that you're facing. So sometimes you need a friend.

All right, let's keep reading.

And he saw and he believed, but they still didn't understand from scripture that Jesus was to rise from the dead. Now I want to pause here and say something we were talking about this as elders before we came in, and James said something so intriguing to me, is he said, all of these people were putting the pieces of the puzzle together from their own idea and interpretation of what they were seeing. So, they were all seeing the same thing. But they're all reacting to it in a different way, because they're all viewing it from a different place. Am I saying what you're saying? And they're all putting the story together.

When we do our lives, we are always putting the story together from our perspective and from us and

We're putting pieces. But while we're putting these pieces together in our life, and we're so certain that we are correct in the way that we're putting the pieces together, there is another story going on.

And it's the one we don't see.

And it's the one that is overarching every moment of our life. And that is the story of Jesus resurrected. That is a story of life, always having life's way of God always been on our side of God, always pressing for goodness and beauty and love and grace in our lives. That story. So, whatever we have going on around us all the time and in us is the Grace, is God's love, is life.

But we collapse it into these tiny moments of how we are perceiving any given moment in our life. But it's so much bigger, it's so much bigger.

So, the disciples went back to their homes. So another way that we deal with events is we leave and we go home.

Home can be old defenses, home can be old habits, home can be addictions, home can be ways of dealing with events when they come into our lives. Home can be the patterns that we've had our entire lifetime

that we return to, when we hit this, we go in, we feel the feels, we feel what's going on, and we go don't want to deal with it. And we go back to things that we've once known.

Let's keep going.

So, they went back to their home, but Mary stood.

She stood outside the tomb crying.

And as she wept, she went back, she bent over to look into the tomb, and saw the two angels seated where Jesus's body had been one at the head and the other at the foot.

Mary stood.

Mary looked.

Mary remained.

Mary allowed her emotions.

Now, that's sweet.

Mary allowed her emotions. Now when we are talking about all of these.

So often, we frame them binary, in good and bad ways. Well, these are good, obviously standing looking remaining allowing, at least to me obvious, is, I think, healthy. The rest of these are bad. They're not. They're just the way we respond. They're just the way we're wired. They're just the way that we have learned to navigate this thing called life. They just are. That's all they are. They just are. So, it's not a matter of going, oh my lord, I see myself in these and I feel bad. It's a matter of going, Oh, I see that. You know, what can change? How can I develop here?

So, as we go on...

Mary looks into the tomb and sees the two angels, and they asked her why she is crying. What's so interesting to me is they're coming from the perspective that he's alive and risen. So, they're looking at Mary going, why are you crying? Like it's not really necessary because he's actually standing right behind you.

Right. But from her perspective, she's, again, to put James' words, piecing the story together with her eyes that are only seeing the story that is in front of her.

How often do we put our stories together from the stories that we're piecing together that are right in front of us only?

Instead of taking that pause back and going, what is the bigger picture? What is God saying in this? And what is the journey of navigating through this?

So, the angels say, "Why are you crying?" and she says, "I've taken my lord away." And she goes, "I don't know where they put him." And at this, she turned around, and Jesus is standing there.

But she did not realize that it was Jesus. This is so poignant and key to me.

Jesus is standing directly behind her. The angel looks at her and says, "Why are you crying?" because he's standing right behind you. And then the angel didn't say that, but in essence, she turns around, and he's standing right there, but she still doesn't see him.

Seeing him, she doesn't see.

Looking, she doesn't see.

So, looking.

See seeing.

We often don't see.

And when that happens, again, we are piecing our story together according to our interpretation, our perception, the way that we're viewing this, and as we're doing that and as we're seeing what we think we see, the other story that's going, the disciples were together with the doors locked, and it says with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, and Jesus came among them and said, "Peace be with you."

With the doors locked.

The final way that I see in this passage, and this is not an exhaustive, of course, is we locked down.

So, events happen, we don't know what's going on, we're trying to figure out what's happening in our life.

We don't go in, we go in with a buddy.

We leave, we go home, we walk away from what we're experiencing in our feelings. We can stand and look and remain and allow for the feelings to come.

We look but we don't often see or we lock down, we put the walls up, we put the hardness up, we increase our heart so that we no longer feel, we avoid what we don't want to see.

Where do you see yourself if any place in here?

What is your go-to? My go-to was always locked down. Something happened, locked down.

Separate, cut off. That was my go-to, any feelings, whatever I had, shut down. Because as long as you shut down, now the sad thing about shutdown is you also shut down your other good emotions, right? Happiness, joy. You shut them all down. You shut down feeling.

Where might you see yourself in that?

So, when Jesus says in this verse, He comes in, they lock the doors, this is what I love. They lock the doors. Jesus doesn't care.

He comes in.

He comes right in the center of our mess. He comes right in the center of our emotions, comes right in the center of wherever we're at.

And he says, "Peace."

So, I don't know how many. No. But right now, I'm a mental health coach with a company called Lyra. That's my part-time job.

And we have a tool that I use all the time, and it's not only known by Lyra, it's everywhere. It's been in psychology forever, and it's called this tool of acceptance.

And it's such a biblical principle for me because it goes along with Jesus saying peace.

Oftentimes when we read this, we go, "Okay, peace."



And then you're like, "How do I get peace?" We don't know how to get there. And we think it's getting there. I personally believe it exists in our soul. It exists in our spirit because Jesus lives in us. But how do we get to that space of peace, that when events happen in our lives, and we don't know what we need to do, we don't know what's coming next, that there is this place that Jesus steps in and says peace to us.

The verses that, hold on, let me move to my other note that Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord." I believe that this, my backup, I believe this principle of acceptance is throughout the whole Bible. When I'm reading the Bible, I'm like, "Oh, my goodness, there's acceptance, oh, my goodness, there it is." But it's just not called that. So, Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path," or "He will make your paths straight." It is acceptance. Acceptance is a path of trust.

Hebrews 11, "Now faith is the substance or being sure of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." I used to read it now faith like I just read it. But now I'm reading it like now faith, the faith that is present, the faith that puts us in these positions when we don't see or we don't know or we hit a traumatic event. The faith that remains here in this present moment is that faith of the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. It is the solid place that we stand because we know the things that God can do, and we know that life is going to rise up. Even when we're not sure of it, we stand in this place of presence. And then the final one is Jesus coming in and John 14 saying, "Peace, I leave you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives to you. Don't let your heart be troubled." All of these things, to me, point to this thing called acceptance.

So, let's journey into acceptance.

Here is the revised text, with proper grammar and broken into easy-to-read paragraphs:

The first step to acceptance is not holding on to me, not claiming. Let me tell you what that word means a little bit.

Most definitions or whatever, I did such a deep dive of a study on this word because I wanted to understand it. Most talk about it is not really touching. It's

more of an exchange of something. It's not like "don't touch me," it's more like "don't bring your influence." It's more of an intimate attempt to grab and hold on and not let go. It is more than mere contact or touch. It's more of an engagement or a handling, or a use, in which some kind of influence or effect is created between the things that are coming into contact.

So, what I believe, my perspective, my opinion, of what Jesus is saying is he's saying, "Mary, the way that you and I have interacted before, you now have to release and let go of where I have been with you in presence and in here. And the influence that you've had on me and I've had on you, our relationship is now changing into something else."

Because he goes, "Tell your brothers that I'm going to my God and your God, that I'm going to my Father and your Father." What he's doing is he's saying, the relationship that we've had before and the relationship even that we've had with God, My God is now your God too. It's a different relationship. When we hit new things in our lives, and we hit traumatic events, and we hit things that knock us off our socks or we hit things that make no sense to us, we enter a new relationship with whatever it is we have come to be a part of.

And there is a journey for us to not cling to what we once had. The quickest way to get stuck is to cling to what you once had. There is a journey of going, "I will release that and I will step into this different place of acceptance where we're gonna go into, and I will learn to live in the questions of what has happened." And again, this can be done for, you know, you can move into a new home and go, "I liked the home that we had before." I mean, I don't care where it what it is, it can be good, it can be bad, it can be different. It can be driving your car and losing your space in line, right? It can be in the grocery store, I don't care what it is, there's an event we don't understand, we react.

You know, there's a saying that talks about two arrows, and it says when an event happens, that's the first arrow. But that's not the one that hurts the most, the one that hurts the most is the way in which you respond to the first arrow. So, life is going to happen to us, it is going to happen to us, Christian or not, we are going to have life happen to us. The difference is how are we going to respond to the life that is happening to us? We can fight it, we can try to what I call punch the tornado, which isn't gonna get us anywhere.

Or we can learn this space of the now faith. We can learn this space. And by the way, as I'm heading into talking about acceptance, it is in psychology, they talk

about it being one of the hardest concepts to understand and to enter into. It is a lifelong process. There is no endpoint where suddenly you go, "I got this." It is a journey every time we hit these moments and these events, that we have to step into a space of acceptance. What is acceptance?

So, let me give you a little, putting these notes away now, people. Let me give you a little. What acceptance is not. The opposite, some of the thought patterns when you're not in acceptance is, "I can't deal with this." "This is not fair." "Things should not be like this." "I can't believe this is happening." "This is not right." "Things should be different." "Why is this happening to me?" Have we all not said at least one of these at one point in our life? Right?

So, some feelings and behaviors of the opposite of acceptance. You blame yourself for everything bad that happens in your life. You feel stuck and don't think you can change. You wish that things were different but you feel powerless. You're angry with the world. You resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms such as alcohol, drugs, etc. Relationship patterns have the opposite of acceptance.

I like this one, you're constantly nagging your spouse, hoping that they will change. You're often disappointed in the choices that others make. You feel resentful of things that have happened in the past. You tend to hold grudges.

How many of us see ourselves in at least one place? In this whole list? Right? We're all there. We're all there. That's why even as I read this text, it's so human. It's so human. But what the church has done is gone, "You shouldn't be like this." And it's like, but we all are. This is how we are. We're all like that. And so, when you're going, "You shouldn't be like this," then there's somehow this paradigm that is set up that there's somebody on earth that isn't like this.

There is no one on earth. It isn't like this. I don't care who it is. We're all weirdos. We're all a little off. All of us just a little bizarre. Once you realize that, it is like, 'Man, welcome to The Club.'

So what acceptance is and what it means? It means being open to your thoughts, your feelings, and your circumstances. It means accepting them as they are, as they happen. You go, 'This is where I'm at right now. And this is what's happening.'

You don't run, you don't lock the doors, you don't go home, you just go. This is, unless you're an introvert, then you gotta go home and think about it. But that's beside the point.

You want to say, 'I can't hear you, don't stay there, right?' Forgot what I was gonna say. Oh, you accept it, your thoughts, your feelings.

That was an epiphany for me. Thoughts are just thoughts. Feelings are just feelings. Where it becomes difficult is when we put an interpretation on them or add to the story or judge them. When we judge these thoughts and feelings, that's when we get into trouble. They're just thoughts, they just come into our minds. They're just feelings. I call them our first responders. They tell us something is going on, they're important to listen to, but we don't have to play with them.

We don't have to invite them in for a cup of coffee. We don't have to wallow in them. We can feel them, acknowledge them, love ourselves, have compassion for ourselves as we're feeling them.

And what this acceptance is, it doesn't mean you approve, it doesn't mean you want, it doesn't mean you like, it doesn't mean you give in, it just means you let go of trying to control or you let go of judgment or you let go of the shoulds. 'I shouldn't be feeling this way, I should be feeling another way.' They just are what they are.

So, the way that acceptance works is when these events happen, we accept the past and the present as they are. When emotions happen, we accept that these emotions are there and they're coming up. When the thoughts happen, we accept that the thoughts are there and that they're coming up. And when other people are doing those things that we don't want them to do, we accept the other people.

Now, what acceptance is not is accepting abuse. What acceptance is not is being in a situation when you need to leave a job, or when things are happening, or when you need to have a voice. It doesn't mean you don't talk. It doesn't mean you don't find other tools to process things. If you know anything about me, you know that acceptance is here. But communication is right next to it. So, it doesn't

mean we shut down. Because people often hear that with acceptance. It means we have compassion about how we're feeling and doing and accepting that.

So, part of building our acceptance skills is perspective, which is what we're talking about, is trusting in who God is. And trusting that though I might be in this moment, that God is always at work, trusting that there is a space of peace that dwells within me because Christ dwells within me. So, this is what I want to do.

And I do this in my coaching, is I want to take us through an acceptance journey. I want to take us through a meditative practice so that we have a space. You have a space that when you leave here, you actually have a tool in your hand that you can bring into your life. And that you can use and I want you to know this. I use this constantly. I am in so many situations, and I have to, even as I'm just standing, I'm taking us through a meditative practice. But I do this with my eyes open, going and you'll understand what I mean in a moment where I'm feeling feels because I'm a pretty emotional person. And, and I will imagine myself putting those feelings on a cloud, understanding that those feelings may come back again because clouds come and go. But that I will be like, 'This is the moment you're in. It's okay if you're feeling what you're feeling. It's okay. It's okay what you're feeling.

You can have compassion and kindness for yourself. And do the feelings come back? Yes. And do they go again? Yes. I just know that life doesn't surround what I'm thinking and my feelings anymore.

Whereas I used to move into them. And think that the way that I was seeing it was right.

Or the way I was feeling was everything. We are not taught that they're just feelings. And they're simply thoughts. And they're important, but we don't have to move into them.

So, I'm going to invite us. I'm going to keep my eyes open. Usually I keep them close, but I'm going to invite everybody in, is it okay to do the acceptance meditation with y'all? Okay, so for those who don't want to do it, that's okay. But I invite you, even if you live in your head, even if you live in your heart, your gut, Kevin, thank you. Where's Kevin? Is he here? Oh, he's not even in here with me anymore.

Just wherever you're at, even if it's in your head, it's okay. Do this through your head that that is okay. But I would invite everybody to just take this journey with me and try it. If you never do it again. Fine. That's up to you. But just take this journey with me.

No, it's okay. Thank you.

Okay, so everybody getting in a comfortable position in your seat. If you want to sit on the floor, you can sit on the floor, you could even stand if standing is more comfortable for you.

And just let your body relax into the chair, I invite you to close your eyes.

And I'm going to ask you to breathe in through your nose as deep as you possibly can right down into your diaphragm into your core. And breathe out of your mouth.

I don't want you to feel your head, how it's sitting there.

Feel your arms.

Feel your body.

And whatever's going on in your body. It's okay.

If you're feeling antsy, maybe you have a pain, just recognize it, just see it.

See that it's there.

That's part of the journey of acceptance is simply recognizing what's going on.

Fill your legs and maybe wiggle your toes a little bit. Feel them.

And the reason that I begin here is to bring you and bring us into the present moment.

I want to bring you into the space of you.

Bringing you into the space of feeling your body, feeling how solid This floor is.

And just feel yourself breathing.

Breathing gently in and out.

And I want to invite you to take another breath deeply through your nose, out of your mouth.

Release any tensions that might be there.

And I want you to come into your body and feel whatever thoughts are going through your mind.

See them, just view them watch them like they're going across a movie screen.

And whatever feelings are coming up, want you to look at them.

If you're in a situation in your life, that's difficult. Take a look at it. Go to the tomb, stand see it, and feel.

It's okay to feel, just allow it.

And oftentimes what happens to us when we're trying to avoid or trying to control, it's like a beach ball in water, and you try to push that beach ball down and make those thoughts and those feelings go away. But inevitably, the pressure builds, and that beach ball pops back up, your feelings will come back.

We can't hide from them, can't shut them down, because they pop back up.

But we can get breath from them.

So, I want you to imagine, maybe it's a feeling you're feeling in your body, maybe it's a pain.



Maybe it's a thought.

Imagine you're the sky. And imagine you have clouds in your sky, and those clouds are floating by. And as they float by, you're taking these thoughts. And you're putting it on a cloud. And the reason that I use the imagery of a cloud is because clouds come and go, and so will our feelings. Thoughts come and go. Even aches and pains in our bodies come and go.

And so we put them on the cloud. And we allow them to float away. So I'm gonna go quiet while you take some thoughts, feelings, whatever you'd like. And put them on those clouds as they float by.

Now I'm going to invite us to take one more breath in through our nose and out of our mouths. And as we're doing that, quietly to ourselves, think about at least three things that we're grateful for. That we're thankful for. Let's take a breath in through our nose and out of our mouth, and think to yourself at least three things you're grateful for.

And whenever you're ready, you can open your eyes. So how was that for you? Give me feedback.

Sending it off on the cloud. Okay, what else?

Gratitude. Okay. Refreshment? Yeah. Anyone else? What?

Relaxing? Yeah.

The journey of acceptance for me is discovering the peace that passes all understanding that is among us always. And when Jesus says, "Peace, I leave with you," He left it. Like he's like, "I'm leaving you my peace, the peace that Jesus is saying, I walked with my whole life. I'm leaving that with you. I'm leaving the Holy Spirit who's going to be the one who's going to be your Peacemaker on the inside of you. I'm leaving that for you. So it's not that we have to find peace or grab at it. It is that it is there, and then quieting ourselves, we discover what is always within us.



We discovered that Jesus is standing right there behind us. And I again, I go back to this image of Mary is she's weeping. She's put the story together from her perspective. She sees she's put the images all together. And James again said this thank God James talked to me. James said this again. She was so caught in her story, that it was impossible for her to see Jesus and what Acts evidence does is allows us to enter into our story, accept the feelings, not fight them, except the circumstance not fight it, accept where we're at not battle against it.

So that it opens something up that we can see. Any comment, James? Before I close? Kevin? Is Kevin back in any comment? All right. So all right.

So this tool of acceptance, I strongly encourage you to bring it into your life; I strongly encourage you to do so. cannot stress enough how frequently it has been a part of my personal journey. Often, I find myself visualizing a passing cloud, using it as a metaphor. At times, when I truly require it, particularly when I am deeply affected, I must find solace in silence and spend some time alone to engage in this practice.

I'm not sure if you're familiar with the Enneagram, but in Enneagram, one personality type is known as the reformer. Enneagram ones have the tendency to constantly seek reform, not only in others but especially in their own families, which they deeply care about. They aim to reform themselves as well. Consequently, I am most critical of myself, constantly berating myself for my shortcomings because I notice every area in which I fall short.

Acceptance has played a transformative role in my life by reminding me that I am only human. It's alright to feel a certain way, to make mistakes, to mess up, and to be plagued by various triggers. The reformer archetype yearns for perfection, but acceptance has taught me to let go of that notion. I wholeheartedly encourage you to embrace acceptance in your own life and discover the inner peace that surpasses all understanding.

Amen? Amen. All right.