

“I have Seen the Lord!” (4 Apr 2021, Easter Day)

Isaiah 25:6-9 A sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

Prayer: God of new beginnings, we come to this, your new day, with joy in our hearts! We come to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus! Thank you, Holy One, for the precious gift of new life in Christ. As we ponder the meaning of this gift for the world, we ask you to open our ears to hear, our eyes to see, and our hearts to receive the blessings you offer us this day. I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be pleasing to you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

“I have seen the Lord!” Those were Mary Magdalene’s words after she had raced back to the house in Jerusalem, breathless from running, to share the good news with the disciples about Jesus. The one who was dead is alive; the one who was lost is found; the one who gave his life receives new life from God and shares it with all who believe! On this Easter Sunday, we affirm Mary’s testimony with what is perhaps the most important article of the Christian faith: He is risen! He is risen indeed!

This is the day! The day we cannot remain silent. The day we can only lift our voices in praise:

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.

His cross stands empty to the sky.

Let streets and homes with praises ring.

His love in death shall never die.¹

The Resurrection of Jesus is proof of God’s love for us, and proof that God is as good as God’s word.

“I have seen the Lord!” Mary said. She was the first to recognize the risen Jesus that Sunday morning so long ago. And yet, I’m pretty sure she did not expect the day to start this way. No one expected that day to start as it did, and the reason for that is very simple—Jesus was dead. No ifs, ands or buts.

- The Romans saw to that when they crucified him on a cross the Friday before.
- Some friends of Jesus saw to his burial in a new tomb where they wrapped his body in burial cloths and sealed the entrance with a heavy stone.
- The disciples returned to Jerusalem where they remained out of sight for fear the Romans or the Temple authorities might arrest them for being followers of Jesus.

We can only wonder what was going through the minds of the disciples on that Sabbath after Jesus was killed. But one thing looming over all their minds had to have been the sight of the Cross and the finality of Jesus’ death. They knew the truth: People die on crosses; no one comes down from a cross alive. As we hear John tell of that first day of the week, the sense of sight plays a crucial role. What the disciples saw was hard for them to process, much less comprehend:

- Mary went to the tomb where Jesus was placed very early, while it was still dark, while she could not see clearly the way ahead. When she arrived, she saw enough to know something was wrong: the stone covering the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. Graverobbers! It was the only logical conclusion. Mary ran back to tell Peter and John.
- The two of them raced to the tomb; John won the race and was the first to see what Mary had reported, but Peter was the first to go into the tomb where he found the grave cloths, but no Jesus. John followed him into the tomb and saw the same things.
 - o Peter saw, and went away perplexed.
 - o John saw, and he believed, yet we do not know exactly what it was that he believed about the sight before him. We are told in the Gospel account “they did not understand the scripture, that

¹ Brian Wren, “Christ is Alive,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, 318.

[Jesus] must rise from the dead” (John 20:9). That suggests John did not believe at that point Jesus was alive. More likely, he believed what Mary reported—the body was missing.

- Once Peter and John were gone, Mary remained behind, weeping. Then she looked into the tomb. The sight that greeted her eyes was different from what Peter and John had seen. Two men, angels, sitting on the slab where the body of Jesus had lain. They asked her who she was looking for; she told them—the body of Jesus. Mary turned around and saw a man who asked her the same question. This, we are told, was Jesus, but Mary did not recognize him. Thinking he was the gardener, she gave the same response and asked if he had taken the body. The man called her by name, “Mary,” and instantly, she knew it was Jesus. She returned to the disciples to report all that she had seen, and all that Jesus had told her.

These contrasting accounts read almost like a crime novel—and, in one sense, there was a crime committed here against an innocent man—where the witnesses see the same thing, but give three different accounts. As one commentator noted:

Three disciples; one tomb.

- One disciple looks in to see grave clothes neatly folded, and believes...something happened.
- Another looks in on the same sight and isn't sure what to believe.
- The third looks in, and sees, and hears her name called, and turns to find Jesus...and believes...Christ is alive!

You know, we might be a bit too harsh on these disciples for being so slow in coming to believe Jesus had been raised from the dead. But our criticism comes with the advantage of 2,000 years of hindsight—we know what happened, we believe Jesus is alive! But I think there's a lesson here for us about coming to faith. Maybe these three different responses to the empty tomb are the gospel-writer's way of saying there's room for people wherever they are in their belief about Jesus. If so, then this story is for everyone:

- For those who have stones blocking the way to belief, God can roll away the stones...
- For those who are certain of what they see and believe...
- For those who look and remain perplexed, unsure what to think...
- For those who need to hear their name called, and turn, and discover Jesus.²

Jesus is there for each of us...for all of us...offering us life through the love of God that never, ever ends.

Many of us have stones in our lives we need to have rolled away, so that we can see new life emerge in Resurrection. When we open our eyes, and our ears, to the love of God in Christ, God rolls away the stones and we hear him call us by name. Then it's our turn to cry out and say: “Teacher! Master!” And Jesus calls us “Brother, sister, friend.”

This Easter Sunday we rejoice again in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Light has overcome the darkness; love has overcome hate; life has triumphed over death. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfills the story of God's love for the world.

- At the birth of Jesus, we sang of how love came down at Christmas;
- On Easter, we sing of a love that rises up higher than we could possibly hope because God raised Jesus from the grave.

Let us go on singing God's praises, day by day and night by night. Let us sing of a “love divine, all loves excelling” that came to us in Jesus Christ. And let us keep on singing until that day when “Mine eyes [will see] the glory of the coming of the Lord!” May your life sing of God's wondrous glory that is Jesus Christ this Easter. Look. Listen. Turn. See! “I have seen the Lord!” Amen.

² Barbara Lundblad, “Commentary on John 20:1-18,” Working Preacher.org, Mar 27, 2016, article on internet, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-3/commentary-on-john-201-18-5>, accessed March 31, 2021.