

I Have Seen the Lord
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Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

John 20:1-18

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So 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.’ ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They 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.’ ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ 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.’ ¹⁶Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because 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.”’ ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Why does this matter? I mean, in our hearts, why do we want to come to church today? Why do we dress up? Why do we feel happy at the sight of the unusual abundance of flowers? Why do we get together for a meal as family? Why does Easter matter to us?

It is an unusual, maybe atypical, some would even say rare, thing which collects us, which draws us - something unseen and yet powerful - into this place on this morning. It is...hope. No matter what else has happened to us, no matter what our day-to-day lives look like, we know, we know when we come here today we will not only find hope but feel hope. It bounces with the excitement of the children. It soothes as it emanates from people who have lived through much and still, still come here, to this place, to worship God, to say out loud, "Christ is risen indeed!" It excites and comforts and renews this hope within us which some days can be so hard to find, but not today. Today it's so tangible we can practically see it.

We imagine the tomb with the stone rolled away and we, we who already know the answer, know that it means good things, great things! We don't even peer down into the tomb, see the wrappings, wonder where our friend, our teacher, our hope has gone. We don't linger weeping because we know better. We have been told, have been taught that Jesus is not dead but alive again, risen indeed, overcoming the worst we can imagine – death. This morning I won't ask you to peer into the tomb – you know what sorrow looks like, what loss, real or anticipated, feels like. I won't ask you to look at the wrappings – you know how it feels when the world is not as you thought it was. I won't ask you to wonder where hope has gone – you have wondered this before.

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned around and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher)...Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her." This is what I ask of you: to allow yourself to be startled by hope, to allow for hope when it seems lost, to listen for God speaking to you especially when you think God must be nowhere near. What Jesus asks of us? That you go and tell others. Tell others that you have hope, hope in Christ, hope because God has saved you, has loved you, has shown you grace and mercy beyond anything you could ever earn.

This telling does not require or expect that we paint a rosy picture of the world around us. In fact, this telling loses its power when the story is all sunny. What is hope when there is never a fear of losing hope? The hope we have to share is so much more powerful because it comes from people who have doubted, maybe even who doubt still. It comes from people who have known a sense of hopelessness or felt unworthy. It comes from people who have struggled through the difficulties which are part of living life. How powerful it is that we have hope still. The apostle Paul tells it this way: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not

forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”¹

The acts of the apostles were exactly this. Peter tells of this same hope in Christ, with different words, to the people of Caesarea, Gentiles, not Jews. Where Peter once believed that only Jews should receive the message of Christ, he had since been shown by God that all that has been made by God is worthy of good news. After being summoned to Caesarea by Gentiles, Peter began to teach with the words we heard this morning: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all.” Peter had known suffering, and suffering because of Christ’s name, and still he shared the good news of Jesus’ loving judgment, of his promise of forgiveness.

Peter explains that not all were witnesses to Christ’s rising but, to those who were, Jesus commanded them “to preach to the people and to testify.” There was, and is, no caveat: if you have your life together now, if you’ve resolved all of your doubts, if you understand – none of these apply. Mary Magdalene was the first to share the good news and to testify, and moments before she was weeping. Not only was her friend, and in him her hope, dead, but the remains of her friend and the remnants of her hope were now missing. In an instant, she sees Jesus and then recognizes him and then goes and tells the others “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” She didn’t explain how Christ came to be in front of her, not dead but alive; she didn’t explain how God had risen Christ from the dead; she didn’t explain the angels she saw. Without any qualifiers or lengthy theological discourses, she told others the pure message of hope – I have seen the Lord.

We come together today because we have hope indeed. Our lives may not be where we want them or where we expected they would be. We may be mourning. We may be struggling with addiction, with anxiety, with mental illness or self-doubt. We may have doubts we cannot see beyond; we may not even believe. But here we are. Because there is hope in the midst of it all, in spite of it all, accompanying us through it all. A hope that might have no explanation in our own words but a hope we can feel. Our hope is in the Lord who is risen, who has defeated death...for us, who has lived a life of grief and sorrow and hurt as we have. We are here because, like Mary Magdalene, we are searching for hope. Here it is found for here we proclaim, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” Here we have a hope that is not fleeting but abides deep within us always. In our own ways, in our own lives, we have been witnesses, have had reason to say, “I have seen the Lord.” Today, and every day, may we have eyes to see and ears to hear and mouths to proclaim that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! In him is our hope.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:8-10.

Let us pray: Lord, our hope, give us eyes and ears and mouths to be your faithful and faith-filled witnesses. Amen.