

We Have Seen the Lord!

2 Easter, Year A – John 20:25

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, April 27, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Okay, here we are on the Second Sunday of Easter and the story of our Lord's resurrection continues. Given the relative size of the crowd last week and this, it's *highly* unlikely that there are whole throngs of you this morning that were *not* here on Easter morning. But just in case, and as a refresher for the rest of us, let's back up and take a look at the story thus far.

Matthew's version of the Easter story that we read last week starts a little differently, but in *John's* version, Mary Magdalene is alone when she makes her way to Jesus's tomb early Sunday morning. To her astonishment, grief, and not a *small* amount of fear and confusion, she finds the tomb empty. She runs and tells Peter and John who run back to the tomb with her. The two disciples that had been closest to Jesus climb into the tomb, see this marvelous sight, have no recorded comment about it, and go home, leaving Mary weeping at the tomb, alone and unconsolated. Jesus himself then appears to Mary And, in John's version, calls her *by name*. (We'll have to talk about *that* one of these Easters.) Mary then returns to the disciples (we aren't told how many of them she finds) and announces to them, "I have seen the Lord."

And now a week has gone by in our time, but like *General Hospital* or *Days of our Lives* or something, the Lectionary picks right up where we left off last week and the story continues as if time had not advanced... Later that same Sunday, John tells us, the disciples are gathered together, maybe in that same upper room where they had shared a meal with their master a few days before. I say 'gathered' but perhaps 'huddled' might be more appropriate, or maybe even 'cowered', because they were *gathered* behind doors that were bolted closed. The disciples, having been told by Mary about Jesus's resurrection (John doesn't say if the other two *ever* shared their vision of the same thing), having been told about the resurrection, the disciples are in hiding for fear of the authorities.

Somehow, in the middle of their locked hideout, Jesus appears to the disciples. And what an appearance it is! Jesus's words are of peace: "Peace be with you." Jesus's actions are of comfort: he shows them the wounds in his hands and his side. Jesus's gifts to his frightened and timid and awestricken disciples are of empowerment and commission: "Receive the Holy Spirit." That Easter evening gathering must have been invigorating and confirming and exciting. And oh, by the way, Thomas (one of the twelve) didn't get a word of it. Maybe it was his turn to stand watch. Maybe he was out doing the shopping – even when you're in hiding, you've got to eat. Maybe he just figured he needed a break – it *had* been a rough week. Whatever the reason, Thomas wasn't there that evening to hear and see. So when he gets back, the disciples have to tell him about Jesus's visit. From Thomas's incredulous response, I can imagine that his briefing must have been extensive, and *perhaps* more than a little bit *heated*. But John records only the short version of the conversation: "We have *seen* the Lord."

Now, John's story goes on to talk about what happened the Sunday *after* Easter as well: how Thomas finally came to understand what the others were trying to tell him. Usually that's the part of the story that finds its way into my sermon on the Second Sunday of Easter in Year A. But something about that simple statement from Mary, and from the Easter morning upper room congregation really kept sticking with me. Because as I read and *reread* the story this Easter Week, I was struck with just how simple the Easter message really is. You and I are here this morning because, like Mary and the other disciples that first Easter, *we have seen* the Lord.

We may not have seen the nail prints in his hands or his feet. But in the difference that he has made in our perception of *everything else*, *we have seen* the Lord. We may not have seen the

spear's vicious tear in his side. But with lives transformed by his love and his grace and his mercy, *we have seen* the Lord. We may not have seen with our own eyes the risen Christ, glowing with heavenly light, yet bearing all the scars of his humanity. But with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with our mind, with all that we do, and with all that we say, with every speck and fiber of all that we *are* – *we have seen* the Lord.

We have experienced the emptiness of the grave, the utter powerlessness of death over our lives. We have experienced the power of Jesus Christ to cleanse our hearts and to free our minds. We have experienced the absolute and unqualified and totally unreasonable love of the risen Son of the Almighty God for the undeserving and unworthy and seemingly unredeemable sinners that we are. *We have seen* the Lord! And that has made all the difference!

During Eastertide, we could get wrapped around the complicated issues of the persistence of the soul versus the resurrection of the body. We could debate the exact moment in those horrid and precious three days when our salvation was accomplished. We could try to merge together the story as told by the various witnesses, or tease out the nuanced differences in their approaches to the miracle and mystery of the resurrection. As your theologian in residence, I recognize that that kind of in-depth analysis is part of what I am here for. But when it all comes down to it, that *one phrase* is all that really matters: “*We have seen* the Lord.”

If we can walk away from Easter morning with that one exclamation, we've got the rest of it covered. If we can show up on the Sunday *after* Easter with that one cry still ringing in our ears, it will make all the difference. If we can get embedded in our hearts the absolute realization that in his saving work for each and every one of us, we have *seen* the Lord, then the rest, as they say, is gravy.

What really counts as we continue to celebrate the Good News of Christ, what really matters for the work that he has given us to do, what can really change the lives of those whom we touch, is that same testimony that changed the lives of the disciples, and changed our *own*: we have seen the Lord. Let's make sure we get that word out.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*