

“I Have Seen The Lord!”

John 20:1-18

October 31, 2022

Read John 20:1-18

This is the Word of the LORD.

Here we are. We have waited a long time to get here. But where is here?

You and I know we are at the resurrection. For those present at the time, things were much more confusing. Can you imagine?

Let me remind you of the sequence of events:

- Jesus had been in ministry for almost three years. He had made multiple trips to Jerusalem for festivals. During those festivals, he taught with authority and manifest the power of the kingdom of God through healings and deliverances. Because of the stir he created, there were plots to arrest him and kill him. None had succeeded.
- Then, Jesus came to Jerusalem for Passover. Immediately before his arrival, he performed his most spectacular miracle to-date: calling Lazarus out of the tomb days after Lazarus had died. The notoriety from this miracle made the religious authorities very anxious; anxious to the point that the high priest, Caiaphas, declared that “it was better for one man to die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.”
- Jesus rode into Jerusalem triumphantly, with people crying out “Hosanna!” Lord, save us. “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!”
- Just a few days later, one of Jesus’ followers – Judas – went to the temple authorities to betray Jesus. He struck a deal.
- After Jesus celebrated a Passover meal with his disciples, they went out from the place where they had gathered and walked to a garden that was familiar to Judas. Judas brought with him both Roman soldiers and the Temple police to arrest Jesus.
- Jesus was arrested. He was taken to Annas, the godfather-type figure among the temple authorities, where he was interrogated. He was bound and turned over to the Roman Governor, named Pilate.
- Pilate used the opportunity to mess with the Jewish authorities until he recognized that something more was going on. Trying to frustrate and placate the crowd at the same time, he ordered that Jesus be flogged. They tortured Jesus and brought him before the crowd in a purple robe and crown of thorns and said, “Behold the man! Here is your king!” Instead of sating the crowd’s anger, it simply exacerbated it so that they cried out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”
- After more discussion with Jesus, Pilate returned to the crowd. He sat on the judgment seat and brought out Jesus once more, “Here is your King!” The crowd continued to call out, “Crucify him!” Pilate asked, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.”
- Pilate handed Jesus over to die. Jesus was nailed to the cross. He died on the cross.

That's it. That's what happened leading up to our text today. The speed with which things turned from good (on Palm Sunday) to bad (Good Friday) was both astonishing and head-spinning.

For those present at the time, Jesus' death was devastating. It was the end of what they thought would be a new time, a new kingdom, and a new world. They hoped in Jesus – the believed in him. All that – all that, was over though.

Don't kid yourselves: the resurrection was not something that even the eyewitnesses accepted easily. Even though Jesus had predicted it, even though Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, even though they had seen him do undo-able things: resurrection was not something they understood immediately.

Look at the text.

Watch Mary. She went to the tomb in grief. She saw the stone had been moved – but by whom? The guards were not guarding, the scene was not at all like it was supposed to be. Can you imagine? Heartbroken already; now, someone had messed up everything she expected to find. Can you feel how frustrated and exasperated she must have been as she ran back to the disciples to report, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they had laid him." In other words, perhaps the Romans were not done humiliating Jesus – even after death.

Watch Peter and John. They took off running. It did not make sense. Yes, the Romans were cruel, but there was an edict from Caesar against robbing tombs. They believed Mary that something had happened; they had to see for themselves. If it was the Romans, there would be little the disciples were going to be able to do about it. At the least, they could check out the scene to see if there were any clues as to where they might have taken Jesus.

John wrote that the two disciples were running together; however, he noted that he outran Peter to the tomb. John wrote that Peter blasted past him into the tomb, perhaps giving us a vivid picture of Peter's personality.

We see the guys acting like guys – all action and busy-ness. But turn your attention back to Mary. After Peter and John left to *do something*, she remained at the tomb. She was *still* crushed. She was still in despair. She was still grieving. She was openly weeping. As she wept, she bent over to look again into the tomb. When she did, she saw two angels.

After the trauma of the previous week, after being emotionally wrung out and feeling like she had been run over by the whole world, to see two angels sitting in the tomb must have felt like an hallucination.

"Why are you weeping?" they asked. She repeated her story, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Remember: we know the story, she did not. The stone was removed. Jesus was not there. The only reasonable inference she could draw from those two things was that "they" – "they" who? someone, anyone, whoever, someone not her and not the disciples – "they" had removed Jesus' body from the tomb.

Would you have thought differently? Even today, even knowing the story, would you have had a different response than Mary? Presented with those two pieces of evidence: the stone rolled away and the tomb being empty; if someone you knew had died and been put in that tomb a couple of days before and with the tomb being guarded by soldiers, what would you think happened? Dead people do

not get up; then or now. Dead people do not move themselves; then or now. Dead people stay where people put them; and if they do not, it is because someone else has moved them, then or now, right? She was weeping because she was just like us. Someone did something that was messing up even Jesus' death – she could not even grieve properly. Would the disaster never end?

Then, someone *else* asked her the *same* question, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Through her tears, through her despair, through her grieving, through her exasperation, and thinking that she must be addressing the gardener who might actually know what had happened, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Oh, can't you just hear her heart breaking all over again?

Now, watch Jesus. Can you see the compassion in his eyes? Can you picture both his heart breaking for the pain Mary Magdalene was experiencing, while at the same time bursting with joy and anticipation at seeing her reaction when she finally recognized him?

"Mary," he said. Just calling her name changed the scene. Slowly and suddenly (if that is possible), she realized who was speaking and her heart leapt for joy. She was the first to experience the fulfillment of the promise Jesus gave to the disciples just a few nights before, "In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live."

As she saw Jesus clearly, she knew fully. She knew, but what did she know?

1. She knew Jesus' resurrection meant Jesus is who he said; it means what he said about himself is true.

The resurrection was (and is) the ultimate sign of power. It definitively shows the power of the kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed. It means that even death could not hold Jesus. This is such a simple truth, yet it is so difficult to understand. It is easy get the idea; it is difficult to embrace the meaning. The resurrection was a sign – no, more than a sign – it was a manifestation of sovereignty and divinity. Only God has the power of life and over death. Jesus had told the disciples that he would be raised from the dead and it came true. So, if the most impossible thing came true, we can have confidence that the other things he said also are true.

Ask yourself today, do you believe what Jesus said about himself? Not just intellectually, but are you willing to stake your future upon the truth of what Jesus said about himself? Are you willing to trust Jesus with your past – the things you wish you had done, the things you wish you had not done? If you have not already received him as Lord and Savior, I invite you to listen and hear Jesus in his own words:

During his travels he said:

- To the woman at the well, to whom he promised living water, which will satisfy the drinker's thirst forever. The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah coming", and Jesus said, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." (John 4:25-26). **Jesus the Savior.**
- To the Jews upset when he told the man to "Stand up, take your mat, and walk," he said, "Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that

all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. ... Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:21-22, 24) **Jesus is the Lord.**

During his ministry he said:

- Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” John 6:35. **Jesus is sufficient for us.**
- Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” John 8:12. **Jesus is our hope.**
- So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ...I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. John 10:7, 9. **Jesus is the judge.**
- “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. John 10:11, 14-15. **Jesus is our redeemer.**
- Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” John 11:25-26. **Jesus is our resurrection.**

During his last night with the disciples, he said:

- Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6. **Jesus is our way.**
- “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5. **Jesus is our life.**

Because Jesus was raised from the dead as he promised, we have confidence that his other promises are true, too.

2. It means we have eternal life and hope, now.

Does it really matter to us if Jesus was *actually* raised from the dead? Yes, it matters. It absolutely matters. What we celebrate today is the difference between hope and despair. It is the difference between life and futility.

Jesus’ resurrection means **we** have life, now. Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. We also must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:5-11)

The resurrection is new life – eternal life – now. It is hope assured, now.

Friends, eternity includes now. Those who are in Christ – those who believe on his name – are being protected by the power of God, now; our salvation is assured and ready to be revealed by the power of God. What God did in raising Jesus from the dead means we have life now. Every bit of that is good news for you and for me. Every bit of that is good news for those who will have ears to hear and hearts ready to receive him.

To that end: if you have not yet received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, if you have not received his grace through faith; I implore you to do so today. “Now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” If God is moving in your heart today, convicting you and drawing you to himself, I invite you to come see me at the end of the service so that we can pray together and share the joy of your new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

3. It means we have life and hope, now; even in the midst of a broken world.

All of that is true and all of that is replete with joy when we look with eyes of faith. As we turn our attention to the world in which we live – now – we also are aware that all is not right – now. The Bible does not say that the resurrection was a magic wand that took away all the evil and brokenness that exists in this life. It is not a Pollyanna wish that denies or ignores the hardship of life. Remember: Jesus went through his Passion – his betrayal, abandonment, torture, crucifixion, ... and death – he went *through* that for us.

As Jesus leads, as Jesus led, so we are called to follow. Make no mistake: the eyewitnesses to the resurrection did not have all the world’s problems magically disappear for them. Even so, *through* all the world’s problems, they lived trusting the good news was worth it.

Mary remained a woman – a woman whose testimony was not recognized as being legally credible. She remained subject to all the cultural expectations and prejudices that women experienced. Yet her witness remained true. The good news was worth it.

The disciples were persecuted, driven out of Jerusalem and driven out of the synagogues, and they were killed for proclaiming the gospel. Yet their witness remained true. The good news was worth it.

Our witness to the resurrection today does not magically solve all the world’s problems. Christians in Ukraine are dying from bullets and bombs. Christians in Afghanistan and China are suffering and dying under authoritarian rule. In our own context here, we have covenant partners of this congregation who are experiencing health crises and financial crises and spiritual crises and family crises and on and on... Yet our witness remains true. The good news *is* worth it.

The church is commissioned – charged, commanded – to bear witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. That’s it. That’s all we have. The church does not have the authority to offer any alternative, to edit, or to impose any other Jesus than the one who died for our sins. Yes, we can offer a prophetic word to power; yes, we can seek justice; yes, we can reach out in mission seeking to bless others – and we need do all of that. However, the only way we can is on the foundation of explicitly proclaiming the gospel of Christ crucified, Christ raised victorious from the grave; Christ ascended in glory. When we stray from that purpose or neglect to stand firmly upon it, we find abuse and error.

The old hymn “The Church’s One Foundation” has two verses that sum this up well:

Tho' with a scornful wonder
the world sees her oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are
keeping;
their cry goes up, "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

'Mid toil and tribulation
and tumult of her war
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great Church victorious
shall be the Church at rest.

Friends, if all we see are the world’s circumstances and the futility of humankind to save themselves, we have only despair. If all we see are the consequences of evil and the blindness of humanity to greed, pride, narcissism, and self-centeredness, we have no hope. If we put our trust in money, power, fame, military might, or any other idol – if we put our trust in anything other than God – we are lost. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

4. Conclusion.

As we conclude today, we find ourselves back on that resurrection morning; asking the ironic question, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Sir, we want to see Jesus. We want to know Jesus. We want to be with Jesus.

He is here. He is with us until the very end of the age. He is alive.

So, if there are tears this morning – like Mary – they are tears that change from despair to uninhibited joy. Today is a day for celebration. “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

That is our testimony, that is our hope, that is our gospel to proclaim. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: Rise Up O Church Of God

Questions:

1. What encourages you to talk with people about the resurrection? What hinders you from talking with people about the resurrection?
2. What do you see when you look and examine the truth of what God has done in raising Christ from the dead?
3. What do you see when you look and examine the ways God has touched, transformed, and moved in your life? What are the stories you have to tell about your own walk of faith?