

"I Have Seen the Lord"

A Sermon Preached at Calvary Episcopal Church Church in Flemington, New Jersey
By Father William Thiele on Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." +

Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Jesus. Over a period of fifty days until he returned to Heaven on Ascension Day many more would see him, too.

The early church either knew those witnesses or knew of them. The Church abounded in signs and miracles. Even now interventions by Jesus, the Spirit and saints are part of the fabric of the Church. We don't walk alone. We never have.

God did not create us for death. The Lord made us for companionship in his activities now and in the life to come. Major religions do define the afterlife differently, but they generally agree that the divine intention is not death. The hope for life is hard wired into human DNA.

Easter, or Resurrection Sunday, affirms that. It is the pinnacle church feast that shows God's extravagant love for us to send his son to become one of us, then in Jesus' suffering to reconcile everyone with Heaven who will trust in him.

Jesus' resurrection affirms that death here can be very temporary. That doesn't mean that death is easy. Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died, but then he raised him up just before Holy Week. And God raised Jesus at Easter. Scripture keeps telling us about God's power over death.

This year we have two back-to-back feasts. Today is Easter, that celebrates life. Tomorrow is April Fools' Day, that offers silliness. Choose life.

The disciples had forsaken everything they had to follow Jesus. They believed that he would drive out the Romans and set up a messianic kingdom in which they would have places of authority. They ignored Jesus' telling them how he must die

Year A, Easter Sunday:

The Holy Gospel

John 20:1-18

Now on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So 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." Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-bo'ni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Mag'dalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Epistle

1st Corinthians 15:1-11

I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you--unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

First Lesson

Acts 10:34-43

Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

as a suffering servant but later rise again. They heard what they wanted to hear. People still do.

Then the Cross came with its pain and humiliation. Jesus finally said, "It is finished," and then he died. They saw him taken down from the Cross. They saw him laid in a tomb. All their hopes died. Now Simon Peter, John and most of the others were hiding in a locked upper room afraid for their lives, but Thomas was absent, possibly hanging one on.

Suddenly, before dawn on that Easter morning, Mary Magdalene ran to them saying that the tomb was empty. Peter and John raced to the tomb and confirmed that it really was. They "believed," but didn't yet know the scriptures. They returned to the others while Mary remained at the tomb weeping.

Two angels asked her why she was weeping, but just as she was replying, Jesus stood before her, also asking why she was weeping. At first she didn't recognize him, but when he said her name, "Mary," she knew that it was the Lord.

She turned to embrace him, but Jesus responded saying, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Mary Magdalene took Jesus' message to his disciples. By using the terms "my brethren," "my Father and your Father" and "my God and your God" Jesus indicated that they were God's family. So are we.

Mary came to the disciples exclaiming, "I have seen the Lord." In the early Church many saw the risen Jesus, and countless others knew someone who had. The fact of the resurrection was so foremost in the early Church that Christians chose to be martyred rather than to deny that truth and the hope of everlasting life.

Influenced by the resurrection, the early Church looked for the promised return of Jesus so much

that many sold their goods and abandoned businesses expecting the Lord's coming quickly. They could have known, as we do now, that prophesied events must be completed before the Second Coming. One can make a scholarly argument that we may now be in the last times.

Mary said, "I have seen the Lord." The spirit still reveals Jesus. The question becomes not whether Christ rose on Easter, but what are we going to do with that fact?

We need to live into and witness to the resurrection imperative, not just for us, but for our children and for those around us, even for our country.

Too many of our homes are functionally godless and otherwise messed up. We have too many single parent homes, physically or spiritually. Children can be plagued for generations adrift from God.

It need not be so. Christ died and rose again for us and for our friends and for succeeding generations. The plan of God is for our own good and reflects his loving pleasure. John wrote, "For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Nearly everyone knows John 3:16, but it requires that we live into it. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." If I love my wife, I will behave as if I did. If we love the Lord we'll show up to worship him. Love and faith are inseparable from actions.

This Easter resurrection morning calls us to new beginnings. Both today and eternity are at stake. May we accept Easter's invitation to blessing.

Mary went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." May we also see him, feel him and know him. Happy Easter.

Christ is Risen! (The Lord is risen indeed Alleluia.) AMEN +