

“I Have Seen the Lord”

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**Sunday, March 27, 2016
Easter Sunday**

**Readings from Scripture
Isaiah 65:17-25 and John 20:1-18**

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord--and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Isaiah 65:17-25

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. 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.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings 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 understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and 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. They 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.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” 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, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus 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.”” 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.

John 20:1-18

This story is all wrong! It's Easter Sunday, the brass is playing, we are singing, glory is dancing in the aisles, everyone is greeting one another with: He is risen! There is excitement and expectation in the air--did I mention it's Easter Sunday?--and this Bible story is all wrong!

The disciples don't get it, they run around having races to tombs. Mary thinks someone stole a body; Have you seen it? Have you seen it? The angels, in dazzling white, don't announce anything. Mary talks to a gardener--still thinking someone took Jesus--only to realize at the sound of her name, that the gardener is Jesus---and when she does---the heavens don't open, trumpets don't blast, angels don't descend singing hosannas, and she doesn't proclaim in a loud and joyous voice: He is risen! He is risen indeed!

And to make matters worse, when Mary realizes that the Lord of the universe, the Savior of humankind, the Son of God is not dead but alive: his first words are: "Mary," followed by "Do Not Hold On To Me." "Do not hold on to me." Savior. Crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day He rose from the grave: and His first words after calling her name are, "Do not hold on to me."

Thankfully for us, on this Easter Sunday, the prophet Isaiah gets it right! He proclaims his pomp and conviction, that God is "...about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.(B)e glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people."

Now there is some Easter hope, some Easter joy, something to get excited about: God is in the process of making all things new! There will be a new heaven and a new earth! We, the people of God are to be glad and rejoice in all that God is up to. For as God continues to renew and restore and re-create, we are to be God's delight.

And not only is God creating a new heaven and a new earth, but the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion and the ox shall eat alike, and on all of God's holy mountain, nothing shall be hurt or destroyed. In God's new heaven and new earth, peace shall reign supreme! Mortal enemies shall live in peace, one with another! All shall labor, enjoying the work of their hands. All shall prosper. All shall live a life blessed by God! Peace. Prosperity. Blessing. Joy and Rejoicing. We, the people, a delight to our God.... Now this is an Easter text!

God all-powerful, all-creative, all-compassionate is busy turning turmoil to peace, competition into compassion, anguish and hurt into hope, enemies into friends, and suffering into blessing. Now Isaiah is preaching Easter; all that deals death and destruction will one day encourage life and blessing and hope for all people! Amen!

And yet....our Bible story for Easter is the Gospel of John, where early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. Mary saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb, so she ran and went to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, and told them: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." She tells the disciples this and they run to the tomb to see for themselves. Mary lingers at the tomb after the disciples leave and, once again, she says; "They have taken away my Lord, I do not know where they have laid him." She is convinced someone took Jesus' body. She wants to find it so she can take care of it, as is her custom. She wants to tend to the body of her friend, her teacher, the leader of the group.

For a third time she says, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." This time she is talking to a gardener, wondering if he knows where Jesus' body might be.

Three times, Mary asks: “Where is the dead body of Jesus?” Three times....

Like I said, this is such the wrong story for Easter. Mary, a disciple, a close friend of Jesus, someone who listened to his teachings, who worked with him for years, who broke bread with him, who anointed him with pricy ointments, who traveled the countryside with him, who knew him better than anyone...surely Mary, of all people, had to know that after he was crucified, dead and buried, Jesus was to rise from the dead. But the story is so clear...so powerful...and so inviting...just like many of us...Mary didn't understand the resurrection of our Lord! Mary, the model disciple, didn't understand that Jesus was to rise from the tomb! Mary didn't get that death could not hold her Savior. Mary couldn't comprehend that in the midst of her confusion, the God of the universe was creating new heavens and a new earth, that death was no longer the end, but the beginning. Mary did not understand that the dead body to be found was not that of Jesus, but her own.

With a simple word: Mary! Everything changed! The Lord of Life triumphing over death called her name: Mary! And in an instant, Mary was re-created...weeping became shouts of joy! Emptiness was filled with an embrace! Tending to the dead became proclaiming Eternal Life! Looking for a body became the first and most profound affirmation of faith: I have seen the Lord!

While the focus of Easter is on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the focus of the Biblical story is on the transformation of Mary, and as such, upon all of us, whose lives are forever changed through a single encounter with the Living Lord. We often find ourselves in the midst of tombs and darkness, when hope seems too far away and it is still the middle of the night. We wander about, seeking some sense of God's presence, but not finding what we are looking for. We read the signs all about us and think the worst. Like Mary, we see the reality before us, but fail to see what God is up to. The good news of Easter is that while we linger in the dark, while we stumble around all the situations in our lives where there is defeat and death, while we try our best to do our duty and are driven to tears...God is still at work. The presence of Jesus, the resurrected, is near!

The good news of Easter is that while we linger in the dark, the light is dawning around us, it is near us, and when we least expect it, but need it most: He calls our name! And then, we, too, exclaim: “I have seen the Lord!” Amen!