

## ***“John: I Have Seen the Lord”***

*1 Corinthians 15:1-20 • John 20:1-21*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • March 31, 2024

As many of you know I enjoy studying history and how it has shaped our lives today. But nothing in history has changed our world as much as the resurrection of Jesus. It's the most important event in the history of the world. The reason? To put it bluntly, "There is no Christian faith without the resurrection." This is what the Apostle Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 15: "If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." As we discussed on Thursday evening, it makes a big difference that Jesus really died and that he really was raised from the grave.

A German theologian named Wolfhart Pannenberg, writing about the resurrection, said: "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

First of all, the resurrection is certainly an unusual event. N.T. Wright tells us, "There were many Messianic movements in the first century. In every case, the would-be Messiah got crucified by Rome, just as Jesus did." He then says, "In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better." In other words, if you were following one of these messiah-types, and there were lots of them, and your guy got crucified by Rome you either gave up the movement all together or you found a new messiah to follow.

This is what we find in the Gospels. After Jesus was crucified and buried his followers knew it was over. They were finished. The reason they thought this was because they knew that Jesus was really dead. They had seen it with their own eyes. There was no question that Jesus had really died and that they had buried him in the tomb and sealed it up. No one regarded the tomb of Jesus as anything but a disaster. So when Mary Magdalene arrives at

the tomb that morning and finds it empty, to her this is just insult added to injury. She and the other women run to Simon Peter and the "other disciple," John's referring to himself again, and they say, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

John tells us that Mary arrived at the tomb "while it was still dark." Obviously he means that the sun had not come up yet but John likes to include deeper meanings as well. There was a darkness surrounding Jesus' followers. They were not able to see beyond the disaster of Jesus' death. At this point, they were beyond hope.

You and I face the same problem today. At some time in each of our lives we find ourselves facing the darkness. We get that phone call in the middle of the night. There's been an accident. Or there's a diagnosis of cancer. Or, the company's downsizing. Or you're just all alone. I don't know what you may be struggling with but I know that it can seem that there is no hope, no future. You find yourself coming to the tomb while it's still dark and the darkness seems overwhelming.

The truth is, though, that none of us is really ready to face Easter until we've spent some time in that dark place where hope can't be seen. That's why we worship together on Maundy Thursday. We spend time reflecting on our own darkness and the darkness of the death of Christ. That's also why the message of Easter is always a surprise to us. Jesus is the last person we expect to show up in the darkness.

But he does show up. John tells us that he and Peter run to the tomb. I love that John makes a point of saying that he ran faster than Peter. But he also admits that Peter is more bold and goes right into the open tomb while John stands at the entrance. When they go into the tomb they see the linen cloths that Jesus had been wrapped in on the previous Friday.

They see the one that covered Jesus' face folded separately. If someone had come to steal the body they wouldn't have gone to all that trouble. Once they saw the empty tomb they went home.

But Mary stood there by the grave crying. She stooped down again and looked inside, just trying to make sense of it all, maybe hoping that there had been some mistake. And that's when hope begins to break into her world and into our world. First, she sees the two angels sitting in the tomb. Then she turns around and sees Jesus himself, except she doesn't know it's Jesus. She assumes it's the cemetery's caretaker. Jesus alive is still not one of the possibilities in her mind. At the moment that Jesus calls her name, though, the darkness is lifted. Things would never be the same again.

Jesus tells Mary not to cling to him, meaning not to try to stay there with him. Instead, Jesus gives her a mission. He says, "go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" So Mary goes and gives the first Christian sermon in history. She tells the others, "I have seen the Lord." You know, an eyewitness is powerful and the Bible tells us that not only did Mary Magdalene and the other women with her see Jesus alive, but that his followers saw him later that evening and within 25 years of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection the Apostle Paul writes that more than 500 other people saw Jesus alive again and that many of them were still alive when he wrote the letter. What he's basically saying is, "if you don't believe me that Jesus was raised, ask one of these people."

Besides the eyewitnesses, there is other evidence that Jesus was raised. The fact that this scraggly little group of followers of Jesus went from being afraid and hiding to boldly preaching tells us that something significant happened to convince them that Jesus really was who he said he was. And they were willing to die because of their beliefs. The thing that convinced them was that they had seen the risen Jesus face to face. They had seen his hands and his side.

So if this really happened, if Jesus is really raised from death, this is something we can't ignore. This is not some historical fact that we can file away. This means that Jesus really is who he said he is. In John 10 Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." Another way of saying that would be that Jesus and God are the same, which is why they wanted him dead. The truth is that Jesus is God. And that means God is dying to have a relationship with you. That's not the kind of thing that we can say, "well that's an interesting fact." It means we really do have to change the way we live our lives and even the way we think about our lives.

First of all, when Jesus said, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God," he's showing us that because of his death and resurrection we have a renewed relationship with God, a relationship that is no longer characterized by sin and separation but rather a relationship of love and forgiveness. It means that we can trust Jesus when he says that he goes to prepare a place for us so that we can be with him forever.

The other thing Christ's resurrection means for us today is that, like Mary Magdalene, Jesus gives each of us has a job to do. As followers of Jesus, we have the responsibility to tell others about him. It's not enough to say, "I have Jesus." Jesus came and sacrificed everything for us and now he's sending us to do the same thing. That's the mission of the church. We are called first and foremost to make disciples of Jesus. It's the work of every Christian. If we're faithful to go where Jesus sends us—and where he is sending us is to the places where he's already put us: our families, our neighborhoods, our jobs, our friendships—the world will never be the same. He promises to be right there with us.

So what about you? The stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Will you trust Him? Will you choose to follow Him? Will you let Him change your life? He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

*Amen.*

