

“I Have Seen the Lord”
2nd Sunday of Easter - April 11, 2021- John 20:19-31

A Brief Meditation on Easter - Bishop Steven Charleston - 2021:

Close your eyes. Wait. Open them again. It will be like that. The moment of change. The transition from one reality to the next. You will be in the familiar, the life and world you have always known. Then it will be as if you closed your eyes. Resting your eyes from too bright a day. They are closed but you are still aware of the light. Then you open your eyes and reality is still there, but changed. Different. Wondrous. Beautiful. Life is an endless vision. Death, only a momentary blink of an eye... (so) let us be humbled by the miracle of change. We are not prisoners of any grave. We are not helpless objects in an uncaring universe. We are living spirits forever sailing behind the great Spirit. We are travelers with our eyes wide open. Amen.

Grace and peace to you from God the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. After so much sameness - day after day of yearlong routines - preparing food, washing clothes, staring at computer screens for Zoom meetings, classes and reunions online - evenings watching movies or sports, and then bedtime. It used to be so fun, this new normal. But then it got really boring, really quickly. But, you know, a lot can happen in just a few days.

Think about what has happened since Palm Sunday around here: we have celebrated with palms and early morning Eucharists, The Triduum services of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and The Great Vigil (at the firepit for the first time!) Some services were in-person, some outside some inside, and some completely virtual. Yet we gathered together around the rituals of our faith - as safely and cautiously as we could - and Easter happened.

It crept up and settled at the feet of the families of Phil Moyers and Mark Ward, a gentle reminder that in the midst of life we are in death. But Easter is tenacious, whispering also that in the midst of dying, we are living into something new, something different, something that terrifies and excites us all at the same time: New Life - something we could never have imagined - but something that God had in mind for us all along. Endless possibilities in the face of old ways that are dying. Open windows and doors that had been shut and locked for what we feared might be forever, are now flung open and the fresh breezes fill our nostrils and our eyes with color, growth and Spring.

So much has happened in our Gospel, since Thomas last saw Jesus. (Remember with me, will you?) They had all finished supper, and gone out with him to pray in one of Jesus' favorite spots - the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. And there, after a long day negotiating a city filled to capacity for the festival, sleep overcame all of his disciples, and Jesus was betrayed by their fellow follower, Judas. Their Lord was arrested, bound, taken into custody, carried away from them - and then one by one, they all ran away - afraid.

As the next hours and days rushed on, they heard pieces of what was happening to him. He'd been taken to the High Priest, Caiaphas, who moved him on to the representative of Rome, Pilate, who had him flogged, while the soldiers mocked him and spit on him and shouted for death by crucifixion. Finally, Pilate gave in to the crowd, and sent him to Calvary, to be crucified.

Maybe the disciples had risked going out to mix in with the crowds and try to catch a glimpse of their Lord. But if they did, what they saw was beyond belief, and they began to fear for themselves again, and went back to the safety of their upper room, where they last had all been together, and they hunkered down sharing bits of information, the few details of what each of them knew. Then the sun set on Jesus' life just in time for the sunset that marked the beginning of the sabbath, and it would not be safe for them to leave until the next day. So they sat, together, afraid. They might have wept, and held each other. They could not imagine what would become of them now.

It was as if they had been living in a completely different reality - a community of care and hope and loving one another - and just as they began to see this new life taking hold, Jesus was taken, and their old life returned like floodwaters crashing down upon them. Rome's grip was real. The Temple leadership had turned. Their lives were no longer of any value, except for what they could produce to feed or to serve Rome. The last three years with Jesus must have seemed like a cruel joke to them then. And their fear and grief began slipping into despair. So much so, that they turned in on themselves and

away from each other, making their way out into the dark to *wherever*, barely noticing Mary leaving very early Sunday morning.

And after a long night apart, they may have awakened with the dawn as they usually did, and stretched themselves to greet the new day, until the great sadness overwhelmed them anew and reminded them again what their life was, on **this** day. They arose, moving slowly, as if a great weight had been placed upon each of them - until, not knowing what else to do, or where they should go, they began to return little by little to their gathering place - the place where they would hear whatever news there could possibly be on this, the first day of the week. Then, Mary Magdalene burst in upon them, breathless with amazing news: ***"I have seen the Lord!"***

The afternoon was filled with questions and details and excitement and well, you can probably imagine... until suddenly Jesus was standing among them saying, *"Peace be with you."* The perfect greeting for a miracle in their midst. Then, laughter and hugs, showing of wounds and a joy beyond what they could have hoped for. And again (and I can just see his face flushed with love for them) *"Peace be with you.* God sent me here for a purpose - and now I am sending you the same way. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will give you power and wisdom and strength to do this work." I would imagine there was conversation lasting well into the night.

But Thomas...was not with them. When they told him later, *"We have seen the Lord!"* his fear, and guilt and grief answered them. *"Well, I'm glad Mary has seen him, and I'm happy that you all have seen him; but unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe any of this."*

And so it was, that a week later (on the 2nd Sunday of Easter) Jesus returned, and appeared in their midst with the same greeting, *"Peace be with you!"* And then he went right to Thomas and invited him to do exactly what Thomas had told the others he would **need** to see and do to believe. And without even reaching out to touch him at all, Thomas **knew**: "My Lord and my God!" What he said he needed, what he thought he needed, melted away as he encountered the Risen Christ - whose mere presence gave Thomas everything he needed and more - to believe and to proclaim with the others, *"I have seen the Lord."*

How many times in the past few weeks has Jesus come to where you are? What did you think you needed when he brought "Peace (to) be with you"? How did the moment occur when you realized that God had just been revealed to you through the grandchild in your lap, in a piece of the story you thought you knew (and yet made you tear up, yet again, when you heard it), as you watched a selfless act unfold right in front of you, or a random act of kindness? Did you realize it was Jesus when that friend embraced you for the first time in a year? Did you see the Light of the World lift a burden as you listened to a neighbor? Could you recognize that God was present in the rain that watered the earth so that the bulbs lying in the darkness of winter's ground could shoot up as the trees burst into bloom to decorate the sky? Or were you humbled as you received Christ's body and blood in your hands within the walls of this sanctuary or out in the garden or at early dawn by the fire? Did your heart sink, then sing as you walked towards Easter morning?

These are merely small signs of just how small we are. Markers on the Road to Alleluia. Mary knew it when she heard him call her by name. Peter knew it as soon as he saw the empty linens in an empty tomb. Thomas knew it when he saw Jesus fill up the space his eyes had given up to death.

What Mary said to the disciples and they said to Thomas, I now say to you: "I have seen the Lord!" And what about you? What do you need Jesus to do so that **you** are able to say, "I have seen the Lord"? Or, have you seen, already? If so, take a deep breath and whisper, Alleluia. (Alleluia) Amen.

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