

I Have Seen the Lord (730 am Easter Service)

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[0 : 00] God, this morning, give to us an increase of your grace that we could truly hear your word to us brought to bear in our lives. And also that we might bear forth the fruit of your spirit, Jesus, your very character, living out your word in this world as we witness to you in faith and hope and love.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. The closing line of George Orwell's book 1984, you may not remember, and neither did I until recently, reads like this.

He loved Big Brother. Well, now, while it wasn't that long ago that I read 1984, I found one reviewer's work called Famous Last Words helpful.

The reviewer wrote this about that last line. It's one of the most chilling returns to the status quo. A resurrection text isn't the last line of John's gospel today, but the words could have been very similar even though the messages couldn't be more different.

You could actually say about Jesus and his resurrection appearance to the disciples that he loved his brothers and sisters. In fact, Jesus sends Mary back to his disciples, telling them to say that he will return to his father and their father, sending them back, as he says in his own words, to his brothers.

[1 : 47] Well, he does so, actually, as he rises from the dead, and Jesus then continues from the beginning of this text to the end, waiting at the tomb for Mary, appearing to Mary at the tomb, and then commissioning his disciples for ministry.

He's all doing this, actually, not dwelling on his own resurrection, but actually naming that he will do this before his ascending. Well, the difference between these two books, that is 1984, and the Gospel of John couldn't be greater.

Jesus' love for his brothers and sisters, was in no way a return to the status quo. A great change was about to occur. In fact, it had already occurred, and the implications of that were following.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead changed everything for his disciples and for us. In this passage today, we see actually what the loss was for Mary and the disciples, and how they leaned into their grief.

Further to that, we actually also see that Mary and we too can listen to the Lord as a result of Jesus' resurrection, and then also look and live in the world in which we find ourselves, living and moving and having our being.

[3 : 04] So let's look at these three things. First, actually, what it looks like to lean into grief. I wonder, have you ever observed a set of facts and believed the wrong thing based upon those facts?

Have you ever received an additional set of facts and rethought your conclusion and then finally believed the right thing? In verse 10 of today's passage, of John chapter 20, there is this relating of this common error and then correction.

The key verse in this first section of today is this. Then the other disciples who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed.

Verse 8 and then following in verse 9, for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Now for some reason, Mary Magdalene got herself up and picked up the pace after our Lord's death.

She made her way to the tomb and attended the body of Christ, or so she thought. She returned to the disciples and made an inaccurate report of the situation. Yes, the body was missing, but not for the reasons that she had thought.

[4 : 17] Her news, not good but bad, made quite an impact on the other disciples. For good reasons, Peter and another disciple then got themselves up and picked up the pace even more after hearing this news.

And the two disciples conducted a little dance at the tomb. The disciples made a more detailed examination than Mary. They saw the linen cloths and the face cloth. Mary then, after they leave, leans into her grief by going and looking in.

The two disciples leaned further in to their grief by entering actually into the tomb. One disciple draws a conclusion.

He develops a conviction. He decides almost like a creed. In other words, the disciple became a believer. Not a griever, a doubter, or an unbeliever.

And as the gospel writer tells us, he saw and believed. Well, what did he believe? I first thought this meant that he believed the same thing that Mary did, that just that the body was gone, that someone had removed it, maybe a grave robber.

[5 : 32] But a closer look reveals something otherwise. Verse 9 suggests something quite different, the conclusion that John brought. For as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

John, in fact, is saying something quite remarkable, quite shocking almost, surprising. As if to say, in spite of his biblical illiteracy, the disciple believed. The disciple believed the evidence.

The missing body, left linens, carefully folded face cloth, pointed to a miracle. The disciple is a little further ahead than Mary and Peter.

But all leaned into their grief and came out in a different place. All actually on the way of believing that, yes, Jesus, in fact, was raised from the dead.

More importantly, Jesus, do you notice, actually stands by, mysteriously hidden. He doesn't rescue the three from their grief yet. Jesus is in content with their grief, their loss, some of their confusion, even misunderstanding, but all the while loving, knowing, change is coming about.

[6 : 49] And Jesus is okay with where we're at with our belief, sometimes our misunderstanding, but knowing that the reality of his resurrection we were brought to bear in our lives and bring about dramatic change.

And so, like Mary and the disciples, we too lean into our grief, our loss, knowing that Jesus is there bringing about this change through his resurrection.

That's the first thing. The second thing is this, then. Look up to your God like Mary because he is right there. The next section begins with Mary weeping outside the tomb, but it ends with Mary announcing to the disciples, I have seen the Lord.

So what makes the difference? In short, it looks like seeing the resurrected Lord is what made the difference for Mary. However, it wasn't Mary's eyes, but her ears that brought about the dramatic change.

Mary saw Jesus twice. The first time she failed to recognize him. The second time reality dawned on her. The difference maker in Mary's heart came not through her eyes, but through her ears.

[8 : 03] But the change didn't happen immediately. After Jesus asked Mary two questions, Jesus brings reality to bear on Mary when he calls her by name.

It all changed when she heard the Lord say, Mary. Life changed even more for Mary now than when the demons were cast out of her. And it's the same for you and me.

When we know what it is that we're seeking and who it is that we're seeking. When we know the risen Lord Jesus Christ is calling us by name. Then we believe.

And not until then. And did you notice in verse 14 and 16 this key word that's easy to miss, which is turn. Verse 14, she turned around and saw Jesus standing.

But then when she heard him call her name, she turned and said to him in Aramaic, Rabboni. When we, like Mary, finally turn toward the Lord, this is the language of away from one and toward another.

[9 : 12] It's actually the language of repentance. Then desire and conviction and belief and faith all converge into one. In fact, we become united with Christ as we turn when he calls us personally.

And at that point, we become followers, longers, lovers, learners, disciples of our Lord. But know this, belief isn't just for belief's sake.

My belief isn't the beginning because new birth is the beginning of our discipleship. Belief isn't enough. We cannot follow Christ apart from belief, but belief must bear forth fruit in the learner.

Belief actually is for understanding or learning. This is Augustine, what Anselm said. I believe in order that I may know or understand. And so we, like Mary, know our Lord calls us and we look to him, we love him, we learn from him.

This account of the resurrection isn't to persuade us of the probability of resurrection. It often gets actually used in those terms apologetically. And that's right. We should look at those.

[10 : 22] But not only that. The resurrection story isn't just counted to persuade us of the reality of Jesus being raised from the dead. It's also there because of who Jesus is persuades us of what the resurrection means for his disciples and us.

So Jesus asks, Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? And he calls her by name, Mary. The resurrected Lord uses our grief.

He shapes our desires. He turns our perspective. And he does this to bring about great change in our life and in the world in which we live.

And he changes it from being me-centered to Christ-centered. And this happens only when we look up to our Lord, when we listen to his word.

And we move then also from learning to loving him as we listen to him. It's the second thing. And the third and final thing then is, Why does he do this?

[11 : 31] It's so that we might actually live for the world in which we find ourselves. Because he sends us into that. So from listening then to loving is the way that Jesus leads his disciples next.

So that we can look out into this world in which we live. Notice Jesus prohibited Mary from clinging to him because he was ascending.

That's what it says in verse 17 two times. Jesus sent the message to his disciples, not that he had risen or that he was leaving, but he was ascending. The message to his brothers, who are not subjects, but brothers, brotherly, their friends, is that they have the same father and that he is going to their father.

Well, Jesus makes this big shift from the event of coronation to now this event of commission. Remember, from chapters 18 all the way through 19, that Jesus is lifted up as a unique king with a unique crown.

And yes, a unique throne of the cross. While he's always our king, he is also our friend. Remember that Jesus is going to lay down his life for others like that of a friend.

[12 : 50] Call me no longer master, he said, but friend. And this is what he does. He sends Mary back to his brothers, his friends. Well, Jesus doesn't dwell on his resurrection with the disciples.

He shows them his side and his hands. He moves on from there to something new in the gospel of John. The meaning of his resurrection is now peace with God and forgiveness for others.

You know Matthew, Mark, and Luke's great commission. But here's another one in John. It's complimentary. It's not contradictory.

And all the teaching about the Holy Spirit before chapter 18 and before Jesus' death and resurrection is applied in this situation.

The Holy Spirit is this great change agent that Jesus promised and will now send because of his death and resurrection. And the disciples will then be sent to proclaim the same message of what the Son was sending, what the Son was giving, what Christ proclaimed.

[14 : 03] And so why is it, do you think, that Jesus was sent? He was sent to forgive. He was sent to save. And so he was sent to make peace for us with God, our Heavenly Father.

And this is the good news. It is the message that the disciples will bring to the world and bring to bear on the whole world. Jesus is, in fact, enacting something for them by bringing his presence into that room where they were hiding.

Why is it that you think that Jesus appeared to them in that room where they were hiding? I think he's showing them that the material word is no barrier between now God and man and woman.

There are barriers for sure. There are moral ones and emotional ones and social ones and spiritual ones. All barriers which actually we erect between God and ourselves.

But there are no physical barriers. Jesus stands among them and speaks peace to them, promises them the Holy Spirit, and that it is exactly what they'll need to take this message into the world to know that God has come through Jesus Christ's life and death and resurrection to bring forgiveness, to bear on people's lives so that they will know that his peace is for real.

[15 : 30] And this comes through new birth, through belief, and through bold proclamation of personal knowledge that lives are changed by his Holy Spirit.

So it is the resurrection of Jesus that changes everything. Now with the help of Marilyn Robinson and one of our members, the greatest miracle, I think, is actually right here among us.

Right here today in Jesus Christ. Our culture has misread the heavens. Recently, I was in Hawaii and I visited a place called Manaoa Key.

And when I was there, it's actually one of the most famous places in the world to observe what we now call space, but what the pre-moderns used to call the heavens. And never before have I seen more stars in the sky and actually so little space.

But the real miracle isn't actually up there. The real miracle is actually right here in the person of Jesus Christ who lived, who died, who rose again, and in this story is on the way to being ascended into heaven where he'll send his Holy Spirit.

[16 : 52] And it's by his Holy Spirit that he's with us today. And he's patient with our unbelief. He calls us personally by name.

But the amazing thing is that he even trusts us with his name. And so now, do you think would he had ever done that had he not risen from the dead?

Our Lord is risen from the dead. He is risen indeed. Hallelujah.