

I Have Seen the Lord!

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John 20: 1-18

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The church considers Easter to be the greatest day of the Christian year—the day of the Resurrection of our Lord. Did you also know that Easter is the only day in the church that is set by the moon? Easter always falls on the Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox, which was March 20th this year, with the full moon occurring on March 30th.

As complicated as that all sounds, when we begin to look at the symbolism of the resurrection—new life, it makes pretty good sense. It is in the springtime that much of new life begins in our world. Trees begin to get their leaves, flowers burst open with fragrant offerings, butterflies make their way out of their chrysalises, those flower bulbs that have lain dormant in the ground all year are now breaking through the earth as the dirt warms up.

As miraculous as all this sounds, spring, though, is completely natural. Biologists, entomologists and probably quite a few other “ists” could tell you the science behind all these things happening.

Resurrection on the other hand is not natural. Nope, resurrection is not natural at all. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not verifiable, either. Richard Lischer, a professor at Duke Divinity School said, “If the resurrection were meant to be a historically verifiable occurrence, God wouldn’t have performed it in the dark without eyewitnesses.”ⁱ

None of the gospel accounts report anyone being present when Jesus was resurrected. We don’t know at what time, what the weather conditions were, nothing. So, with this tremendous lack of knowledge, coupled with the magnitude of importance the resurrection holds in the church, how are we to square the events of the resurrection in our logical, 21st century minds?

Maybe the resurrection is best understood *not* by trying to prove or disprove it, but rather by experiencing Christ’s victory over death in the church’s ongoing mission in and to and with the world. Maybe the resurrection is best understood through each community and individual’s personal experiences of resurrection in their own lives.

What, you may be asking? Me experience resurrection in my life? I don’t think so. Well, think about this:

When old adversaries who have not spoken to each other in years share the cup of salvation and the bread of life at the Lord’s Table, and are later seen shaking hands after worship—that is resurrection.

When a person’s life is transformed through the power of God’s Spirit acting in their life—resurrection has occurred. “I once was lost, but now I’m found,” and resurrection has happened. New life springs forth and we will never be the same again.

But back to Jesus’ resurrection. That is a little harder to explain. We know that when humans die, they are buried, or cremated, or whatever. We don’t expect

them to come back to life. We may go to their grave three days after their death to pay our last respects, but not really ever expecting to physically see them again.

Maybe that's what Mary was doing that Easter morning when she went to the Jesus' tomb. I've heard the question asked before about Mary's visit to the tomb, asking *did she go there to verify her beliefs or to confirm her fears?* Why did Mary go to Jesus' tomb? Well, from her reply to the angels—"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him," it is clear she came to express her grief and to mourn Jesus' death—not to profess that he has risen.

Are we really any different? Have we already made up our minds what God will or will not do? Have we not been told over and over again how God will take care of us, how God loves us and how Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly? And yet . . . don't we worry and fret over our own lives, leaving God completely out of the picture on most days?

What does our faith say about us when we are faced with the empty tombs of our lives—when we arrive at the tomb with questions and doubts and fears? Does our faith say "He is Risen?" or does it say, "He is not here?"

"Do we approach the tombs of our lives, the difficult situations which at one time or another we all find ourselves in, looking for a confirmation of the glory and power of God; or do we approach them looking for a confirmation of our worst fears?" Well, I would gather to say we probably do some of both.

But one thing we can learn from the disciple Mary in our lesson today is that maybe we just need to stay a little while with our doubts and fears and questions. Mary stayed at the tomb with her doubts, her grief and her fears.

Mary lingered outside the tomb long enough for Jesus to come to her. Mary was searching, searching for her Lord, trying to find some answers when she finally heard her name and recognized the voice of her beloved friend and teacher. She didn't turn and run from her fears and doubts and questions—she stayed with them long enough to find an answer.

God's voice can and will break through *our* doubts, our questions, and our fears as well, but sometimes we have to be willing to sit with the doubts—to stay at the tomb a little longer like Mary did.

Resurrection **can** happen in our lives today. God can take the impossible and make it possible. God can raise **us** to new life and the fresh hope of new beginnings.

"I have seen the Lord," Mary told the other disciples. And her tears of grief were turned to joy. Have you seen the Lord? Are you willing to let God lead you to new life?

As we share the Lord's Supper together in a few moments. I invite you to take that time of silence to visit the tomb in your mind. Sit with your fears and doubts, let the questions come, then listen . . . listen for the teacher's voice, hear him calling *your* name and experience resurrection in your life this Easter morning! Amen.

ⁱ Richard Lischer, "We have seen the Lord-resurrection of Jesus-Brief Article." Christian Century, March 17, 1999.