

-Christ is Risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluiah!)

-”Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.”

-What do you see this morning? Think about it for just one second.....what do you see this morning? You see sunlight? You see people talking and smiling? You see children laughing and playing? You see people eating and sharing food with one another?

-”Was blind but now I see.” What else do you see? You see your anxiety about if you are going to have a job or not this time next year? You see your fear about not being there enough for your kids? You see your grief about having lost a loved one recently? You see your anger and sadness about how broken and unjust the world is?

-What else do you see this Easter morning? You know, this Easter story is a famous story. One that most of us can recount, at least in part, from childhood. For most of us, I would guess, this the part of the story we focus on is the resurrection and the theme of new life. It is about Jesus leaving the tomb and “coming again”. Certainly this is part of what we lift up today.

-But, what if, connected with all of these things of course, this story is also a story about “seeing”? Here’s a question: why did the women come to the tomb? (to rub Jesus’ body with perfume and spices right?). This is the version of the story many of us may remember from Sunday school, except that’s not how the Gospel of Matthew tells the story. Notice the women are NOT carrying any spices. It reads: “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see *the tomb*.”

-In addition to this, interestingly, in the chapter before (chapter 27), when Jesus is being buried by Joseph and laid in the tomb, Matthew writes: “So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.” (v.59-61).

-Why on earth were these women concerned about “watching the tomb?” What did these women see? They saw the stillness of death. They saw the abuse of governmental power and the mob mentality taken to the extreme. They saw fear of Jesus’ body being “stolen” and armed guards standing in front not letting anyone in.

-Let’s be honest here: these women disciples saw something that the 11 male disciples did not. They saw something when *another woman* came into the house and spread perfume over Jesus, anointing his body for burial. They saw something in Jesus’ words: “But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man raise again!” They saw something different from the male guards after the earthquake, the guards who “became like dead men”.

-In addition to this, it’s interesting to see these women’s response to the earthquake and the stone being rolled away. Here these guards, these men trained for war, faint in fear and yet

there is no description of how Mary and Mary feel about what they are seeing. The angel gives a usual biblical greeting: do not be afraid. Yet, there is no indication they are afraid by what they see. In verse 8 it says they leave the tomb quickly with “fear and great joy”. Yet, the greek word that’s translated here as fear (*phobo*) is not the “fear of the boogyman” kind of fear. It’s the kind of fear that you get when you are on the edge of the Grand Canyon or a mountain looking across the valley. That “fear and wonder” kind of fear. You could also translate it as “awe or reverence”. They left with “awe and joy”.

-Yet again, the women got it. They did not see ultimate fear like the male guards, but instead were in awe of the work of God transforming.

-For me, these women are inspirational in this resurrection story and point to the value of seeing. “Was blind but now I see”.

- How does Easter make us see differently? The message of Easter can become trivialized, I think, when only go to resurrection. Jesus rose again, so now the world is OK. Jesus has risen again, Alleluiah! But that doesn’t give us the excuse to live in our little “resurrection corner” and not see other things that are NOT OK with the world. Suffering still exists today, war still exists today, Climate Change, corporate greed, corrupt governments, hunger, and disease all still exist too. Does this mean Jesus’ resurrection was all for not or that God’s work didn’t affect everything in the world. Well, maybe we need to take a cue from the women disciples and “see things in a different way.” Maybe it requires us to see resurrection, new life, hope, and fear differently.

-What do the women see conquered in this story? Fear. Paralyzing fear that gripped these guards no longer affected these women. It had been transformed to an awe, reverence, and respect. Because of what they saw, fear was now temporal. Fear now had a different place.

-This, I believe is still true about the Easter story. We no longer have to see fear as fully taking over. We no longer have to fear grief. It can give us courage to enter into our grief and fear without fear. Resurrection doesn’t erase fear, but transforms it. Fear is a natural human emotional response, but it doesn’t have to rule us. God calls us - frees us - to see things differently. Take for example the cross: what was once a symbol of power, and fear, and death is now transformed into life and promise. It’s depends on what you see. That’s what the women saw over 2,000 years ago and what we can see today.

-Will there continue to be evil in our world today? Will we continue to feel fear and anger and sadness over the way the world is so different than how we want it to be? Yes. But it’s because of the power of Jesus Christ rising again: God’s love and radical work in this world that today, we don’t have to see evil as final. Our hope is to lean on each other to see, and to reflect God’s love in the places that need it most. That’s the Christian life that we walk. That’s the hope that we share today.

-Thank God for the women who “got it” and didn’t give up on seeing God’s work transform the world. May we have the courage, this Easter, to do the same. Alleluiah!
Amen.