

## WHAT MUST YOU SEE?

2 Easter – B April 8, 2018

John 20:19-31

This Sunday after Easter (the second Sunday *of* Easter) is filled with a whole host of emotions. As the church, we continue the story of “Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed!” and we sing the hymns of Easter for these seven Sundays of Easter, always keeping in mind that each Sunday, each “first day of the week” that we gather is still “a little Easter,” a continued celebration of the resurrection of Jesus; for that is the Good News that is central to our faith.

Today takes us back to those moments when word of Jesus’ raising was only just getting out, and the news of the empty tomb reached a group of Jesus’ closest friends including, by the account of John’s gospel, Mary Magdalene, who encountered the risen Jesus outside the tomb. John’s gospel gives us some more information to work with, compared to Mark’s account of the Resurrection, which you heard last Sunday in our joint worship with All Saints’.

In John’s account, not only does Mary Magdalene meet the risen Jesus, but she rushes back to tell the others: “I have seen the Lord!”

Now, the Sunday after Easter is commonly referred to as Thomas Sunday or even “Doubting Thomas” Sunday, because this portion of John’s retelling is read every year on this Sunday. But if you heard the first words of where the story picks up, right after Mary’s announcement, it seems that doubt (and fear, and confusion) have seized everyone of Jesus’ closest friends, because they are all huddled together in a locked room. All apparently, except for Thomas, who becomes the foil for this story on seeing and believing.

But Thomas only asks for that which the others had experienced. A chance to see Jesus, the Jesus he last saw, marked by the wounds of his horrific death. Anything less could be an imposter. (Remember, Thomas himself was called “the Twin.”) No one who has spikes driven through his hands and feet can come out of this alive. So if the impossible had indeed become possible it could only be seen in One who had experienced death, was marked by its mortal wounds, and who had overcome death. That is what Thomas wanted to see: the Jesus the others had seen.

Luther Seminary professor Karoline Lewis turns to us and asks: “What is it that we need to see to believe? To believe that death has indeed been overcome? To believe the promises of the resurrection...to believe that the Kingdom of God is truly present in our midst? Or, what is it that we can’t see, refuse to see, because somehow we think that validation of the resurrection is something we should expect or that we can mandate?”

She explains that obsessing with provable facts means: “we miss the truth entirely – ‘the truth’ that never was *something* to be believed but *someone* that makes believing possible.”

In that *someone*, believing is created in relationship, specifically the relationship that God made, and continues to have, with us. Because of the relationship God has with us—a relationship of unconditional love, God guarantees the relationship by becoming one with us, God-with-us, the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, the Risen One. Because Jesus was raised from the dead and because we are forever connected to him and in relationship with him (through water, bread, and wine), the One who has been raised from death promises we may have life and have it abundantly. And, “through believing you may have life in his name.” [John 19:31]

Building on the supporting readings for this Second Sunday of Easter, Professor Lewis helps us

see what that life looks like: *When we “see” resurrection as relationship, then the vision of Acts comes into full view and actually seems possible: “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need” [Acts 4:32-35].*

*When we “see” resurrection as relationship, we know how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity [Psalm 133] and we cannot but strive for fellowship with one another [1 John 1:7].* Karoline Lewis at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org) for 04-08-18

Keeping relationship in mind, since it is both a driver and a result of Jesus being raised, a number of scholars have gone deep into the text at the first part of this passage and noted that there has been a translation issue there is a grammatical issue in this passage: The word “sins” is missing from the second half of that verse and the verb “retain” can be translated “hold fast” or “embrace.” If you read it this way, you have, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, and anyone whom you hold fast (or embrace) is held fast.”

I mention this because, you will notice: Jesus did show up and condemn or chastise Thomas. For that matter, nothing tells us that any of the others did, either. He isn’t excluded, but rather, the other disciples and Jesus hold fast to Thomas so that he too may come to believe. It’s perhaps another sign of community/relationship in John’s gospel: “To forgive each other, to hold onto each other, to embrace each other, especially when we struggle, until we are caught up in an experience of the Risen Christ.” David Lose, “In the Meantime” at [www.davidlose.net](http://www.davidlose.net)

I hope that you, too, will be caught up in the Risen Christ, knowing that long ago, in your baptism, God proclaimed: “You are mine” and meant it, not just for the moment, but for all time. Amen.

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed, Alleluia!*