

John 20:1-18
(Psalm 16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-10a)
“I Have Seen the Lord”

Introduction

Every one of us – young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak – will one day die. Therefore, the thing that matters most of all is whether or not this story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is merely an invented story, a myth told to help people facing death somehow face it with a measure of peace and hope, or a true story, told by people hounded and persecuted and finally killed for telling the story, yet who held fast to it because they had seen Jesus die, and then three days later had seen him risen from the death. And if this story is true, what matters is this: How can Jesus’ victory over death give life to me and to those I love? How does Christ’s victory over death become ours? How do the truth and power of his resurrection begin to enter our experience and change our apprehension of life, particularly at the places where life is killing us, physically, emotionally or spiritually?

Body

1. Jesus specializes in broken people, in folk like you and me.

Mary Magdalene was a woman whom Jesus had delivered from demon-possession. She was a broken person whom Jesus had healed, and whose life had thus become completely wrapped up in the hope that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One whom God had promised would come to deliver his people from their brokenness and bondage.

We forget this so quickly, and lapse into the popular notion that God prefers smart, strong, attractive, good people. That satisfies us as long as we do well playing the role of upstanding citizen, as long as people praise us and feed our insatiable egos. But when something happens that rocks our world, that forces us to recognize the areas of our lives that are not what we had thought or what others had thought, then we reflexively think that we must scramble and get our lives in order before God will love us, accept us, or give our lives meaning and hope. We think, in other words, that God is like us, that he evaluates and values people according to the same measure we use. How different God is, thank God! Next time you are in a judgmental mood – looking at the world, at those around you, even perhaps at yourself, with fear and loathing – go look in the mirror and say, “There but for the grace of God goes God.”

Recall the scene between Jesus and the Mary of Luke 7:36f. Remember Jesus’ words to the self-righteous religious folk sitting around him at table, who thought that the woman was too bad to be at the party, and that they were too good to have anything to do with her: “He who is forgiven much loves much.” Only the broken-hearted – only those who realize how broken their lives are and how much the Lord has forgiven them – only they will love the Lord and love broken people deeply, truly and well.

2. Jesus meets us where we are, then leads us to life's deeper questions.

He asks Mary, "Why are you crying?" and, "Whom do you seek?" The connection between these two questions is not at first apparent to us. Why are you sad, depressed, angry, disappointed? What is it that you are looking for this morning? Or perhaps I should ask, *whom* are looking for? When you leave here, after you have eaten and said goodbye to family and friends, when you have turned off the T.V. and the music, and sit in silence with nothing but your own thoughts for company, then what will rise up in your mind to trouble you and rob you of the day's peace? What wakes you in the night? What grips your gut and makes you anxious about the future?

This is precisely where Jesus meets us. How often we miss him, because instead of listening for his voice, we turn on the TV, turn up the music, turn to the computer, try to run from our thoughts, ignore our hopes and fears. Yet, this is the very point where Jesus always meets us and calls out to us. And this leads us to the heart of the mystery: the mystery of God's love for broken people like you and me.

3. Jesus calls us by name: he doesn't begin by identifying himself, but by identifying us.

I can believe that God cares for the cosmos: It is his, he made it. I can understand his loving the nations, his heart being moved by the masses of lost, hurting people. I can even understand him loving you. But it is hard for me to believe that he knows *my* name, that out of all the billions of people in the world he cares for me. Yet here is the heart of the good news of the gospel: He knows my name, and calls me by name. In other words, he doesn't come crashing into *my* life in order to answer *your* questions. He'll tell you your story if you'll listen, and he tells me mine. He doesn't call me by your name, or you by mine. That's why each of our stories, each of our lives, is in wonderful ways completely unique.

Once I posed my proud questions: Is there a God? If so, who is he? Why should I worship him? If he is almighty, how did he manage to make such a mess of things? If he is all-good and all-powerful, why is there suffering and pain? These are good questions, real-life questions. What was his answer to my questions? He simply called my name: "John, my dear child, stop running from me. Come home. Everything you want, everything you need is here, with me." Thus it has always been. Mary's despair ended the moment Jesus spoke her name: "Mary." Then she knew it was the Lord, and that death had not triumphed over life and love. Faith and hope sprang back to life, as the one she loved called her name.

I locate myself generationally by confessing that I love Bruce Springsteen's music. He has written no more haunting lyrics than those to "Secret Garden." But the lyrics, heart-wrenchingly lovely as they are, are simply not true. However enchanting her secret garden may be, no woman – and certainly no man – has "everything you want and everything you need." Only Christ, who lived our life, died our death, rose in triumph

over everything that would separate us from God's love, and who now meets broken people like you and me in the midst of our journey toward death and dissolution, only he can give us what we are longing for, what God made us for: forgiveness, everlasting life, and an eternity of loving well and being well loved by God and the greatest extended family one could ever hope to find.

4. Jesus entrusts his mission to us.

There is one final point: It does not stop with me, nor does it end with you. "Don't hold on to me," says Jesus, "Go tell the others." So Mary returns with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" This is the most powerful message we can give to anyone: Not philosophical arguments for God's existence, not the logical flow of systematically arranged theological truth, not demonstrations of spiritual power, but the testimony of a transformed life, the credible witness of a person who has met the Lord along the way, and has been transformed by the encounter.

Conclusion

What of you this early Easter morning, as the sun begins to rise and scatter the darkness of night: Have you yet met Jesus along the way and heard him call your name? Could you even hear him if he called you, or do you keep the music playing so loudly that it drowns out the cry of your own heart? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And he will meet men and women throughout the world today and call them by name. From that moment on, nothing will ever be the same for them. Don't miss him when he calls your name. Don't let life pass you by this Easter season.

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