

Easter Sunday – Year A – April 24, 2011
Acts; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20: 1-18
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The editorial in *Life* magazine circa 1956 reads in part, “The resurrection cannot be tamed or tethered.... It is a vast watershed in history, or it is nothing. It cannot be tested for truth; it is the test of lesser truths. No light can be thrown on it; its own light blinds the investigator. It does not compel belief; it resists it. But once accepted as fact, it tells more about the universe, about history, and about humanity’s state and fate than all the mountains of other facts in the human accumulation.” That’s a pretty bold statement of faith, one that fifty-five years later would probably be edited out of most magazines. For most of us, who are well-schooled in the traditions of cultural deception, politics, lies and more lies, half-truths and hidden agendas, seeing or hearing is no longer believing. Faith is much harder to find on the menu of life’s delights. Faith is too often mashed into a footnote in tiny print, where rationalism is the order of the day. Karl Barth once said that what really brings us together in the mystery and wonder of worshipping what we can no longer see, except with the eyes of faith, is the unspoken question that clings to our hearts and minds, “Is it true?” Is it true that God raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit? Is it true that God gives us abundant life? Is it true that God redeems and heals us? Come with me on our journey today, and let’s see for ourselves.

The world is filled with so many illusions we can quickly become disillusioned. By definition, an illusion “is a distortion of the senses.... While illusions distort reality, they are generally shared by most people.” With so many illusions in the world, we have to ask, what *is* real, what *is* true? Mary comes to Jesus’ tomb in the garden while it’s still dark. Scripturally, darkness is a time when we are most susceptible to our human weaknesses, and most likely to assert our perceived independence from God. It’s also the time of dark forces or the powers of the world, when those who are adept at shuffling the truth and dealing lies deceive us most readily. Mary is in another kind of darkness, overflowing with grief and loss. She does not remember Jesus’ teaching about His resurrection, but immediately suspects that His body has been taken away. She runs to tell the disciples, two of whom race back to the tomb to see for themselves. Peter enters the tomb and sees the grave clothes lying there, arranged as though the body of Christ has simply moved through the linen. The other disciple also sees, and we’re told that he believes, although what he believes is not yet clear. Then a strange thing happens. The two men simply go home. Seeing has not prompted believing. It’s now Mary’s turn.

When Mary looks into the tomb, she sees two angelic messengers. They don’t need to tell her not to be afraid, because she’s so consumed with her own grief that she doesn’t seem to be startled or surprised at all by their appearance. When the divine messengers ask why she’s weeping, she repeats her tale of great loss and concern for the whereabouts of Jesus’ body. Only then, does she turn around and see Jesus, whom she presumes to be the gardener. Mary’s turning around is more significant than a casual reading of the text suggests. The meaning of the word involves not just a physical turning, but a complete change of course. It reminds us of repentance and turning again to God. For Mary it is the beginning of a faithful response to God. As the day dawns, and she becomes a new creation bathed in the light of Christ, she is tasked by the Good Shepherd to share the Good News of His resurrection. As we hear the echo of Jesus from John 10:27-28, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.”

John’s gospel has several themes running through it that are carefully developed from beginning to end. Some examples: ‘come and see’, Jesus’ miraculous signs, light, living water, the Good Shepherd, as well as the constant misunderstanding and literalism of the disciples and others. In the opening words of John’s gospel we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” There is a distinct thread connecting John’s gospel account with the story of creation in the Book of

Genesis. As we come to the end of the gospel, we find ourselves back in a garden with Mary. We are meant to understand this as the Garden of Eden, and yet there is still a misunderstanding when Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener. The joke is definitely on us. If this is the Garden of Eden, as we are expected to understand, then the Gardener is God. Truth and reality is standing right in front of Mary, and surrounds us as well, if we are willing to see and hear. Yet we so often choose to overlook the truth for a lie, and reality for illusions. We are tempted to rely on our own distorted perceptions instead of the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There's one more piece of the puzzle for us to come and see, to fit into place in the picture of truth and reality portrayed so beautifully for us in today's Gospel reading. After recognizing Jesus, He tells Mary not to hold on to Him, and goes on to say, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Christ is the firstborn of the new creation. When we come to Christ in faith, we too become a new creation, empowered to share the truth of the resurrection as we proclaim, "I have seen the Lord." Yet there is more. In Christ, we are now a new family – Jesus' Father is our Father – we are brothers and sisters in a new community of faith, which is the Body of Christ in the world. We have traveled full circle from the words of John 1:12 that says, "to all who received [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." Beloved, we **are** children of God, and so it begins. Seeing, hearing, and believing is the beginning of our own lives of faith, a spiritual journey of transformation. Everyone who encounters the risen Lord is given a task, a new vision to share, and a mission. You and I are no different. God has given us the power to become His children. Becoming children of God inevitably means that we must grow, develop, and mature in Christ. Jesus' resurrection is just the beginning of our freedom in Christ. We're all invited to come, see, and experience forgiveness and healing, abundant life now, and unending life in the age to come. In faith – in the light of Christ's love – we must answer the question, "Is it true?" for ourselves.

The key that unlocks the answer is to know life – not some cultural illusion, a smokescreen, or a dizzying array of distractions, but real life in Christ. Truth and reality is: our intimate connection as a community of faith; our ever-expanding and deepening relationship with God, and with one another; the sharing of our stories of how Christ has and does make a difference in our lives; the confidence and hope for eternal life that we celebrate; our healing made manifest in so many ways; our faith in action brought to life through our many ministries, wherein we love our neighbors as ourselves; our prayers; our Bible study; all the ways we live compassionate lives that reflect the eternal wellspring of love flowing through us to the glory of God's name.

"I have seen the Lord!" The risen Christ is present, vital and active here in this community of faith. The truth is I see Christ in your faces, in your words, and in your deeds. As we go out into the world to share the Good News of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, here is a beautiful description of resurrection, and our resurrection lives now from the *Warrior Song* of King Gezar. "The seeming opposition between life and death is now cut through. Do not thrash or lunge or flee. There is no longer a container or anything to be contained. All is resolved in dazzling measureless freedom." In His resurrection, Jesus has freed us from sin and death, to enjoy abundant life in Him. See it. Hear it. Believe it. Live it.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!