
He is risen indeed!

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 31 March 2024 Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43 • 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 • John 20:1-18



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The story is complete. The work is done, the task is finished. The journey that began with the birth of a baby in Bethlehem on Christmas Day has ended, with the rising of God's Son on Easter. What an amazing journey it was for our Lord Jesus Christ! And what an amazing journey it was for those people who were closest to Jesus when he was on earth, his disciples and followers. It was nothing less than a journey from doubt and fear to confidence and faith.

What do we notice about the following verses from our Gospel story?

- ❖ v1 Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away
- ❖ v6 [Peter] saw the linen cloths lying there
- ❖ v8 The other disciple ... went in; he saw and believed
- ❖ v12 [Mary] saw two angels there dressed in white
- ❖ v14 [Mary] turned around and saw Jesus standing there
- ❖ v18 Mary went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord

What do these verses have in common? In all these verses, Peter, Mary and the other disciples are doing what? They are seeing. They are looking at what is in front of them. It is often said that “seeing is believing.” But is that true in this case? Did Peter and Mary and the other disciple really see what was in front of them? And did they believe what they saw?

All through the Gospel, and the journey that Jesus made from his home town to his final days in Jerusalem, he was followed by at least a few and often a lot of people. They saw him; they heard him speak. He was a human being like them, like us. But what did they see in him?

Some saw a rabbi, a teacher, who gathered some disciples around him, just like other teachers. Like John the Baptist, for example. But they weren’t the only ones who had disciples. It was a common thing for people to find a teacher whom they liked and understood, and to spend their time following him around and learning from him. So some people saw Jesus as a person like that.

Some saw a troublemaker. The Pharisees and the scribes, and the priests from the temple saw Jesus as stirring up trouble for them. He was getting the people all excited, and the more they listened to Jesus, the less they listened to the Pharisees and priests. Well, they didn’t like that much. They wanted people to listen to them. So they saw Jesus as a troublemaker.

Some people saw Jesus as a fake, someone who was saying ridiculous things about himself, comparing himself to God. They thought he shouldn’t say things like that. It was wrong to set yourself up as equal to God. It’s still wrong — but of course, Jesus *is* equal to God, so for him it’s OK. But these people didn’t see it like that.

And, eventually, some people saw Jesus for what he is: the Son of God and the true Lord, who loves his people and wants to take care of them, like a shepherd takes care of the sheep.

But seeing isn’t always believing. Even people like Peter and Mary Magdalene and the other disciples — did they believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Really

believe it? Not at first. It took until the time Jesus rose again from the dead, as we see in today's Gospel. And the biggest, most exciting sight that any of them saw, was when Mary saw Jesus outside the tomb. She didn't recognise him at first. It wasn't until he spoke her name, that she turned to him and said, Rabbi. I imagine her sighing with relief and joy: "Rabbi — it's you. Thank God!" Of course there would be surprise in her voice; but mostly, I think, there was love in her voice. Jesus had not left her alone, but had come back to her, and to the other disciples.

And this is important for us today, because — we can't see Jesus like they did. They saw him face to face. We don't. But in a way, we do see him. We see him inside our heads, inside our hearts. We see him because we understand that he loves us, and will always be with us. If we understand that, then in a way we see him, and we see him even more than the disciples way back when, who saw but did not understand. Jesus told them that when they see him, they see the Father, and the same is true for us. When we see Jesus — when we see him in our hearts and in our heads — we see God. Jesus is our way to God, our way to truth and life. We see Jesus because we believe in him. So I guess, for us, believing is seeing.

And the way to keep Jesus in our hearts and our heads is to keep believing in him. Believe that the promises are true. Believe that what Jesus did on that Passover so many years ago was for our benefit. Believe that God loves us so much, and Jesus loves us so much, that he died for us. He died — for us! And because he died and rose again, escaping even death, we also can live.

He died — he rose — he lives — and we live with him, in his love, forever.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Amen.