

It is early in the morning – while it is still dark, that Mary makes her way to the tomb where they have placed Jesus. She has not come to witness a miracle of resurrection. She has come to grieve his death. She is bringing spices and embalming items that reveal her intention to finish preparing the body of Jesus for burial. The feeling in her life was one of despair. Despair over the loss of Jesus. I believe we can understand here feeling of grief. Our religion – and others, I might add – teach that death is a passage to a new life. But when death comes to someone we love, someone close to us, it is hard to hear the teaching of the church. Death brings us to grief.

Death obscures our sight and clouds our vision. I imagine that was what it was like for Mary early on that Sunday morning, the first day of the week as she made her way to the tomb. Maybe that is why everything seemed so confusing. She arrives at the tomb to discover the stone had been rolled away. She could not find the body inside. Maybe she thought of the arrest of Jesus in the garden; the trial before Herod and Pilate, then flogging and whipping, and his cruel death on the cross. It was too much, so she runs. She runs to the disciples and tells them that someone has taken the body of Jesus and she does not know where to find it. The men run to the tomb and find that what she says is true. The body is gone.

Mary does not realize the new life brought by Jesus until Jesus speaks her name.

She supposes the person is the gardener. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will go get him." Jesus calls her by name, "Mary." It is then that she recognizes him and responds, "Teacher!" It is in this moment that she realizes what God had done in Christ. God has redefined our living. Our death is not the end, it is the renewal of our life. Life is not defined by death. Life is defined by living. I am not asking you to believe in a literal bodily resurrection. Some believe that. But I am asking you to push beyond the experience of sadness, the experience of grief, the experience of loss at the death of a loved one. It is not their death that defines them. It is their living. Sometimes, it is in our sadness that we realize the significance of a life lived with us. It was early, on the first day of the week, and it is dark. But it is dawning on Mary just how important love, forgiveness, friendship, serving have become to her. Love, forgiveness, friendship, serving become important to all of us as we recall it lived in those we remember. Resurrection is not a memory. Resurrection is a live, active force that calls us to the future. It is in this understanding that Mary goes to the disciples and proclaims, "I have seen the Lord."

Easter sermons are sermons about the gift of God's grace in resurrection. Grace. It means to be found by a love that never stops looking for us.

Do you know the game hide and seek? It is a game played by children. Adults do not really know how to play the game. Adults want to find a really good hiding place where they will not be found. My college room mate told me a story about playing hide and seek with his children. If he did not find them soon, they would come out where he could find them. The point of the game to them was not hiding, but being found. In our text for today, Mary is found. Jesus calls her name. The resurrection does not make crucifixions okay. Resurrection calls us to a different kind of alleluia. Resurrection is catching sight of something we don't usually see when the words are all dressed up in Easter Sunday's bright colors. The question the gardener asks Mary is the same question that Jesus asks the first disciples when he calls them to follow him at the beginning of his ministry. "Who are you looking for?"

"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" It is when Jesus calls her name that she is able to go report to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!"

So, how about us on this Easter Sunday? It doesn't have to be early in the morning, on the first day of the week – but that is a place we often start our journey to the Lord. Have we seen the Lord? Do we understand that this gift of love given to us at Easter, this gift that will never leave us, is a gift that we are called to share with others?

Fred Craddock was a teacher of preaching – still is. He tells a story of going with the president of the school to receive a large gift of money to the school for the preaching program. When they got to the man's office he was ready for them – had his check out to write. The man offered a prayer before he was to write the check. Just before he signed the check, he said, "Now, this all goes for the preaching program?" The president answered, "Yes sir, that's what it goes for." He started to write the check and said, "Now, you do understand, none of this goes for women or blacks?"

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The president stood up and said, "I'm sorry, we cannot accept your money under those conditions." As they left the man said, "Well, there are plenty of schools that will." Craddock wanted to talk about it but it was all over. He and the president were silent on the way home. The man had given to schools and churches over 60 million dollars, but not a penny is to go to women or the blacks.

To me, "I have seen the Lord" informs our living. Who are we looking for today?

How will we know the Lord if we see him? The man writing a big check would never see the Lord if the Lord appeared as a black or a woman. I suspect that many times we do not see the Lord because we do not think the Lord will appear in children.

Many churches have excluded gay and lesbian people from their congregation.

Surely, they believe, God would not appear in those folks. We cook and serve food at the firehouse shelter. Do you think they see the Lord in us? A question equally important is do we think we will see the Lord in that homeless line of hungry people? We teach about community service to social studies students in the ninth grade. Will they see God in their community service? Will we see God in them as they begin to view themselves as members of a larger community?

Easter!! God comes to open our eyes to the call to life. God comes to renew our lives. God comes to roll away the stones that imprison us.

"Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" Like Mary, we do not always recognize Jesus in our midst.

Easter!! Jesus calls our name. It is in that relationship with Jesus that we are brought into the presence of God. It is in our living that we, like Mary, proclaim, "I have seen the Lord!"