

**Sermon for Easter Day Year C 2019**  
*I Have Seen the Lord*

Just two nights ago, some of us gathered here in this sanctuary to observe Good Friday—

together we heard the story of Christ's Passion, the arrest in the garden,

his trial before Pilate, the mocking and the crown of thorns, his crucifixion, death, and burial.

This year we heard the Passion on Good Friday

as a series of ever darkening and growing shadows of the cross— from the shadow of betrayal,

the shadow of temptation,

the shadow of desertion,

the shadow of denial,

the shadow of accusation,

the shadow of mockery,

the shadow of death,

and finally the shadow of the tomb.

It's a hard story to hear.

It gets to us.

But not long after the story ended,

like the rest of you, I got in my car and went home,

had dinner, and started getting ready for Easter morning.

Of course, the stores have been getting ready for Easter for weeks now . . . they always seem to be way ahead of the church in getting ready for any holiday (dare I evoke Christmas already?).

Still, the link between Easter and new birth

runs long and deep in our culture's collective consciousness.

And because Easter is late into April this year

and we have had what feels like a long winter

with so much cold weather and little sunshine,

it is good to have all the niceties of springtime renewal all around us.

And yet, we are gathered here,  
a sign that when it comes down to it,  
we know we need something more,  
something deeper, something more profound than flowers,  
bright colors, bunnies and chicks and baskets of candy,  
as lovely and fun as they are.

The reality is that each of us lives in a world  
whose shadows make all the secular trappings  
of the so-called “Easter season” seem a bit trite.  
After all, national and international news continues to include  
public violence and domestic violence, the burning of churches—  
some due to arson, another due to human error—  
just this morning the news of the bombings of churches  
in Sri Lanka while people were worshipping for Easter—  
and the ever deepening of political divides . . . here and abroad.  
Closer to home, some of us have made our way  
through this week amidst news of loss,  
or the pain of disease,  
or troubles at work or troubles among family.  
Tulips and daffodils do give us some cheer in the midst of it,  
and yet . . . are they enough?

Perhaps, ironically, what we end up actually needing  
in order to somehow make way through the mists and muck,  
the despair and the dread,  
the peril and pain what we actually need is . . . a tomb.  
No, I don’t mean that we should just curl up and die,  
even if we feel like it some days.  
Rather, we need the tomb to run to,  
the tomb to look into, the tomb to enter.  
The shadow places of our world will only be defeated  
when we actually go there, to the tombs,  
not when we pretend—for a moment or for a lifetime—  
that they don’t exist.

*You need to look into the tomb for yourself, writes Sara Miles,  
author of the popular memoir “Take this Bread.”  
You need to go right up  
to the scariest, ugliest, saddest place in the world  
before the sun has risen,  
and look without flinching into every dark corner.  
You will look and find the broken-hearted  
and those who live with violence;  
you may look and find yourself gazing into your own soul that falls  
asleep, or denies the truth out of fear, or runs away out of cowardice.  
But even when it makes you weep,  
go right up to the tomb, and look in.*

When we do, like Mary Magdalene, like Peter,  
and the other disciple, we will find out two things.  
Glimpsing the discarded wrappings that once contained his body,  
we see that Jesus has been there.  
There is *no tomb* to visit where Jesus hasn’t already been.  
There is no place of despair within us,  
and no place of death around us,  
that hasn’t already been met and embraced  
by the very presence of Christ.  
When you look into the tombs,  
then you know that Christ has been there.  
And if you can’t see the wrappings,  
then you may not have let yourself venture far enough in.

The other thing you’ll see, the other thing you’ll experience,  
the other thing you’ll know—praise God—when you look,  
is that Jesus may have been to the place of death,  
but he is not dead.  
The tomb is empty!  
The tomb is the place Jesus goes,  
but it not where he stays . . .  
and it is not where we shall stay, either—thanks be to God!

This story, this journey of running to the tomb, the empty tomb, it is where centuries upon centuries of Christians have begun the journey of faith and true life.

Now, I know it seems like an odd place—after all, it's perhaps like biting off the hardest piece to chew first. I'm struck, though, by the observation of Pastor Martin Copenhaver:

*As modern people, who like to think of ourselves as sophisticated, he writes, we sometimes forget that the idea that God could raise someone from the dead would be as difficult for these ancient people to believe as it is for us. These ancient people were not stupid. They had seen many people die and never once had they seen anyone come to life again.*

And yet, on an early morning long ago, Mary and Peter and the other disciple did run to the tomb, and each of them in their turn looked in to see the double truth that Jesus had been there and that he was not there anymore.

The tomb was empty!

Christ was raised and is alive!

It's just as we'll confess very shortly:

*Christ has died.*

*Christ is risen.*

*Christ will come again.*

Now, sure . . . they didn't immediately realize the fullness of this second truth—after all, just like when we are expecting a newborn baby, all the physical changes and ultrasound pictures in the world still reveal so little about what the new life emerging will be like. It will be, actually, a surprise—utterly familiar and yet utterly unknown all at once.

And yet, at least in Mary's case,  
this surprising potential and promise  
soon enough called out a name—her name—  
and an empty tomb became the window through which  
she and all of them could look and say,  
“I have seen the Lord!”

Beloved friends, beloved disciples, I ask you this Easter Day:  
where are the tombs in this world and in your own lives  
that need to be run toward, and looked into?  
Where are the tombs of this world and in your lives  
that need to be recognized for not having the power  
to contain and constrain the Word of the Living God, Jesus Christ?  
Let's go there, together.  
Let's make this story not simply a relic from nearly 2,000 years ago,  
but a present and living reality.  
Let us be the ones who, even the midst of our own tears,  
declare “I have seen the Lord.”

After all, as Bishop Munib Younan,  
head of the Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land,  
wrote in his Easter message this very weekend:

*The message of Easter is not idealism.*

*Christ's victory over sin, death, and despair is the only hope that has  
kept Christians steadfast in this land for two thousand years . . .*

*And it is the only hope that today will carry us through these confusing  
times here in the Middle East and throughout the world.*

*The Good News of the resurrection gives Christians clarity and purpose,  
no matter where they are, and no matter what the future brings.*

*Jesus, the Light of the World, the Morning Star,  
goes before us to lead the way.*

The truth is we celebrate Easter here every Sunday—  
we gather here in the presence of the Risen Christ—  
we hear his Word to and for us,  
we touch his wounded hands when we share his peace with one another,  
together we share in his risen life in bread and wine at his table.  
Through our lives together and all these things and more,  
God is giving new life to us.  
Each one of us can say today with Mary, “I have seen the Lord.”

So, let us go!  
Let us go and tell of the hope that is within us—  
not that the tombs are no more,  
but that, ultimately, they are empty—  
empty of meaning, empty of finality, empty of power.  
Let us go and be witnesses, the heralds,  
the sources of real truth and actual reality amidst  
the world’s false facts of domination, hatred, sickness and despair.  
The world *is* yearning for another way.  
There are people who need to hear  
that death does not get the last word,  
that life—all life is sacred—  
that, indeed, God is good and so full of gracious love  
that God doesn’t give up on the Good Friday world,  
and so the stone is rolled away from the tomb.  
That is what it means to say, “I have seen the Lord.”  
It means, love wins.  
It means, goodness is stronger than evil.  
It means, mercy and forgiveness can heal us.

So, once again, I say, let us go!  
*I have seen the Lord!*  
Let us pronounce it far and wide—say it with me now:  
**I have seen the Lord!**

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*  
*Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!*