

Resurrection of the Lord (Year A)

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Today is going to be a beautiful day! According to my iPhone, it's going to be a high of 71 degrees and partly cloudy. In my opinion, it's gonna be a perfect day to sit outside on a back porch and read the newspaper! In fact, if you don't mind, I think I'll do that right now. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll just browse the headlines here a minute...

Oh dear. "Korea Tensions Could Overheat - a Call for Restraint - U.S. Ships Are Nearing Peninsula Amid Talk of Nuclear Tests." Oh dear. That can't be good.

"3 Years After Kidnappings, Nigeria's Parents Are Still Waiting." Lord, have mercy...

"United States Drops 22,000 pound "Mother Of All Bombs" in Afghanistan." I thought "mothering" was about creation and care, not destruction and devastation...

"Arkansas Scheduled to Execute 8 Death Row Inmates in 10 days."

Well, folks, I'm sorry, but it looks like nothing but a lot of broken stuff. Broken people, broken relationships, broken peace, broken policies, broken everything. Maybe I need to put down the New York Times and try for some more local news. Perhaps the Shelter Island Reporter will have something a little less broken...

Oh look! "After Grueling 9-Year Process, Pepe Martinez, who owns STARS Café with his wife, Lydia, becomes U.S. Citizen." Now THAT'S something to celebrate! Perhaps this is the start of a trend towards more uplifting news? Let's see...

"Shelter Island Enters 13th Straight Month Debating Short Term Rental Regulations." Nevermind, perhaps this was a bad idea. Perhaps I should just put this paper down...

...wait a second. Something just caught my eye...

"Executed Man Accused of Blasphemy and Sediton Rises from the Dead - 'I have seen the Lord,' says local woman."

It was a chaotic scene early on the morning of the first day of the week. Yellow crime scene tape surrounded the area outside an empty tomb that, until recently, held the very dead body of a local man crucified last Friday on charges of blasphemy and sediton. To the left of the empty tomb was a group of religious leaders scratching their heads and furiously flipping through the pages of their Bibles, wondering what they might have missed. To the right of the empty tomb was a legion of Roman officials huddling to come up a public statement. Just beside them was the Roman Emperor himself, with his smartphone in hand, preparing a hastily worded tweet to his millions of Twitter followers insisting that any mention of resurrection was definitely FAKE NEWS! In between both groups was a neatly folded set of garments, clothes that had been lovingly placed as if it were understood that this scene would be on the front page of the paper. Off to the side, beyond the religious leaders and the Romans, were two followers of the formerly-dead, with one bent over at the waist apparently still catching his breath. Behind them, running off into the distance, was a woman gleefully screaming the following words, "I have seen the Lord!" Five words that would come to be regarded as the first ever Christian sermon.

No one could have predicted what would happen when this man came on to the local scene. He began his life as an immigrant refugee on the run, seeking shelter from a violent government. Upon his return, he traveled the country side, challenging the local presuppositions of the day. The things he did, the people he sought out, everything he embodied, threatened the powers-that-be. Healing people on the Sabbath rubbed the religious leaders the wrong way. Speaking of "his kingdom," a kingdom that was more eternal than the Romans, rubbed the Empire the wrong way.

According to sources - speaking on the condition of anonymity - the condemned man gathered with his disciples last Thursday and took bread and broke it and poured out wine into a chalice and shared both with his friends. As the bread and wine was passed around, he made "ominous" statements about the bread being broken like his body would be broken and the wine being poured as his blood would pour "for the forgiveness of sins."

Another source - found warming his hands by a charcoal fire last Friday - said that he heard through "a friend of a friend" that this man was arrested in a garden and taken before the chief priests and Pontius Pilate.

As the fire burned low and the shadows danced upon the faces of those around it, eyewitnesses reported a bound and bloodied man being tossed back and forth between the religious leaders and the politicians. The religious leaders, citing strong accusations of blasphemy, wanted the man executed, but they lacked the legal and religious authority to do so. So they handed him over to Pilate who, by all accounts, did everything he could to rid himself of such drama.

Eyewitnesses report that on three separate occasions a spokesperson for Pontius Pilate released a statement insisting that he found no case against this condemned man. However, the religious leaders cornered Pilate by reminding him that this Jesus Christ (as he is known) claimed to be the King of a Kingdom which was a direct threat to the sovereignty of the Roman Empire.

Left with little choice, Pontius Pilate ordered the man crucified.

It was a gray day, devoid of color and cheer, when the man was crucified. After an agonizing time on the cross, the crucified one uttered the following words, "it is accomplished," and breathed his last.

Another source - again speaking on the condition of anonymity - confirmed that the body had been placed in a tomb, sealed with the heaviest of stones, and devoid of any sign of life.

It was the end, or so it seemed. The religious leaders left satisfied that justice had been done. The Romans slept easily that night, knowing that their power was still supreme. But all that has been brought into question by the scene that was found Sunday morning by the tomb.

Word of this "resurrection" (as people are calling it) has spread like wildfire. A local woman known as Mary Magdalene was the first to tell her story. "I have seen the Lord!" she exclaimed when asked for comment. When pressed for further details, she simply reaffirmed that Jesus was no longer dead.

The Reporter has received several unconfirmed reports that this Jesus has been spotted in numerous places by numerous people. Cries of "I have seen the Lord" have changed to "we have seen the Lord."

Representatives of both the religious leaders and the Roman Empire have declined repeated requests for comment. But recent actions have spoken in ways much louder than words. Religious leaders have been sighted debating whether to denounce the authenticity of the resurrection, on the one hand, or to revisit their understanding of God's love, on the other hand. Only time will tell how the followers - and doubters - of Jesus will react following his alleged resurrection.

Earlier this morning, in what many are calling an apparent attempt to divert attention from this Resurrection, the Roman Empire attacked a nearby Syrian air base and dropped a 22,000 pound bomb in Afghanistan. It appears as though the Empire is struggling to reassert its power at a time its sovereignty is being brought into question.

It appears as though this carpenter from Nazareth has gotten the better of the powers that be. Reporting live from the empty tomb - the Gospel Writer of John.

Friends, make no mistake about it. The resurrection is not fake news. It is not a liberal or a conservative notion. The resurrection is truth, albeit an absurd one. Jesus Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! This sets into motion things that have and will continue to humble even the most boastful of principalities. Death, long thought to be the final arbiter of all things, is now humbled. The Roman Empire, long thought always have the final word, has been silenced. A new word, the Word, has spoken and that word has spoken life into lifelessness. The Truth has spoken! It is accomplished!

Friends, it is true that there is suffering in this world. But it is not *the truth*. *The truth* is that Christ is raised and dies no more! What *is truth* is that we have seen the Lord! What is truth is that the brokenness of the world will not stand because not even death can keep us from the love of God! What is truth is that we belong to a God who overcomes death and promises us life ever lasting. That truth is a power that you and I preach whenever we say that “we have seen the Lord.”

“We have seen the Lord!” Five little words that change everything. And perhaps those five little words will spark other five-word sermons that you and I can preach together.

We will keep on loving because **we have seen the Lord!**

Death no longer holds us because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will feed the hungry because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will clothe the naked because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will love all people because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will welcome the immigrant because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will forgive each other because **we have seen the Lord!**

We are broken but saved because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will not give up because **we have seen the Lord!**

We are confident in discipleship because **we have seen the Lord!**

We will live in hope because **we have seen the Lord!**

Friends, I have seen the Lord and so have you. Let us go out this day and let that seed take plant!

Christ is Risen, **He is Risen, Indeed!**

In the name of the Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!