

WPC
Rev. Ken Sunoo
April 4, 2010 – Easter Sunday

I Have Seen the Lord
John 20:1-18

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

Mel Blanc was known as “The Man of a Thousand Voices.” If you’ve ever watched any Looney Tunes cartoons, you’ve heard him. He was the voice of, among others, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Sylvester the Cat, Tweety Bird, and Porky Pig, who would appear at the end of these cartoons and say, “That’s all, folks.” When Blanc died, his will stated that the following inscription be put on his tombstone: “THAT’S ALL FOLKS.”

I have a question for all of you this Easter morning: For Christians, is that inscription true? Is it accurate? In other words, for Christians, is death a period, or only a comma? For the early followers of Jesus, when they saw Jesus die on the cross, it sure felt to them that death was a period. All hope seemed to vanish with Jesus’ death – that’s all, folks.

Jesus was put in a tomb, and at the dawn the day after the Sabbath, John the Gospel writer says that Mary Madgalene came to the tomb and got the shock of her life. The stone had been rolled away. She went and told Peter and the Beloved Disciple what had happened, and those two ran to the

tomb to discover that the body of Jesus was missing. Then they returned to their homes.

But not Mary Magdalene – she stayed, scratching her head, trying to understand. She looked in the tomb again and saw two angels – she asked them where the body of her Lord had been taken. She turned and saw the “gardener” and in her grief, she said to him, “If you’ve taken the body of our Lord, tell me where so I can take him away.”

And then Jesus, who was really the “gardener,” said to her, “Mary,” and she realized he was not dead, but alive. After conversing with Jesus, Mary then went to the disciples and preached the first Easter sermon: “I have seen the Lord.”

I’d like to make two reflections on Mary’s witness.

First, notice how personal Mary’s testimony is – it starts with the first person singular “I.” Craig Barnes says: The question that Easter asks of us is not "Do we believe in the doctrine of the resurrection?" ... What the Gospels ask is not "Do you believe?" but ‘Have you encountered a risen Christ?’¹ Faith is always personal - can you say, “I have seen the Lord?” For some of us here, this is the first Easter without a loved one. Mary understands that kind of pain and grief because of what she experienced on

¹ Craig Barnes, “Savior at Large,” Christian Century, 2002.

Good Friday. Now, because of her witness on Easter Sunday, we can share in the same hope she had that Christ is risen – he is risen indeed.

Secondly, notice the irony of what Mary says – “I have *seen* the Lord.” Seen – remember how her eyes played tricks on her in the beginning? She thought Jesus was the gardener. She didn’t see him at first because she wasn’t expecting to see him. Jesus is so close to us, we can reach out even now and touch him, but often we’re so preoccupied with other things in our lives that we don’t even see reality around us.

Tom Tewell tells the story of the time when he was the pastor of the New Providence Presbyterian Church in New Providence, NJ. He was a young pastor, new to the ministry. One habit he had was, once his sermon for the week was finished, on Saturdays he would take a long jog through the community and see if he could work with the sermon in his mind and try to memorize most of it.

One Saturday afternoon as he was preparing to preach for the New Providence Presbyterian Church the next morning he ran by a lawn party, and as he jogged by he thought he saw a woman in his congregation – Bob and Mimi were a couple in his church, and he worked with Mimi in the church and thought for sure it was her.

Bob and Mimi were close friends with Tom and his wife, so he ran up to her and, being such close friends, he tapped her on the shoulder and said, “Excuse me, do you mind hugging a sweaty jogger?” She turned around, looked him in the eye, and said, “I’d love to hug you.” Tom looked her in the eye and realized that he’d never seen this person before in his life. Then her husband started to walk over toward him. He said, “I can explain this. I am the *pastor*... of the New Providence *Methodist* Church.” His eyes had played tricks on him. Have your eyes ever played tricks on you? Have you ever seen something that you didn’t see at all?²

“I have seen the Lord.” The good news is that even when we don’t see the Lord right away, he’s always close by. We may mistake him for the gardener, but he never leaves us alone. And that’s good news because in this life, we will go through hard times. When we face job loss, illness, the loss of a loved one, we know that is not the last word. Death no longer has the last word. For Christians, death is not a period, it’s a coma. The last word is Jesus Christ, not death, as difficult as death still is. “That’s all folks” is not on a Christian tombstone; our words are: “He is risen indeed.”

Barbara Brown Taylor says that the appearances of the risen Jesus are what cinches the resurrection for her, not what happened in the tomb:

² Dr. Thomas Tewell: “Easter in September,” National PC, Sept. 1, 2002.

“What happened in the tomb was entirely between Jesus and God. For the rest of us, Easter began the moment the gardener said, ‘Mary!’ and she knew who he was. That is where the miracle happened and goes on happening -- not in the tomb but in the encounter with the living Lord.

In the end, that is the only evidence we have to offer those who ask us how we can possibly believe. Because we live, that is why. Because we have found, to our surprise, that we are not alone. Because we never know where he will turn up next. Here is one thing that helps: never get so focused on the empty tomb that you forget to speak to the gardener.”³

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

³ Barbara Brown Taylor: “Escape from the Tomb,” Christian Century, 1998.