

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday
April 4, 2010

“I Have Seen the Lord”

Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18

There has been great rejoicing in the Hoyt house this weekend.
James can see again - and we didn't even know he had gone blind!
Well, okay, not blind, just nearsighted -
things up close he can see, but things further away are fuzzy.
He came home from 4th grade recently
to report that he was having trouble seeing the board.
His teacher, Mr. Brough, told him he needed glasses.

Sure enough, the eye doctor confirmed it - James is nearsighted.
So he picked out his frames, ordered his lenses, waited eagerly,
and on Good Friday his new glasses arrived.
Driving home from the store he began to read street signs
that he hadn't been able read before.
Wow! I never noticed that.
Wow! I can see that dog's ears.
Wow! I can see the little holes in the electrical outlets.
After the Good Friday service he said
Hey Dad! I can see the gray hairs in your beard
all the way from the back of the sanctuary!
And I can actually see Mr. Hack's face up in the choir
rather than just his head!
Of course, now Mary Ellen and I are feeling like the worst parents on the planet
for not realizing our boy was half blind.
Hats off to Mr. Brough!

Today, on this Easter morning, the scripture readings area about seeing.
The verb “to see” occurs seven times in the Gospel reading
as the story of Jesus empty tomb unfolds.
Mary see the stone rolled away from the tomb.
Peter and the other disciple see Jesus' grave clothes lying in the tomb.
Mary sees the two angels in the tomb,
then she turns and sees who she thinks is just the gardener.
Until he speaks to her and she realizes that in fact she is seeing Jesus.
And when she runs back to the disciples, her breathless announcement to them is,
“I have seen the Lord!”

Easter is about receiving new sight.
It is about the amazing proclamation: I once was blind but now I see!
But the new sight of Easter morning does not come from any human lens crafter,
it comes from a new reality that breaks forth, blazing into the world.
Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher and healer and prophet, the Messiah,
was raised from the dead on the third day.
His hope and vision for the earth were vindicated by heaven.
It turns out, the God of heaven and earth really is his Father.
It turns out that, in the words of the Roman centurion,
"Truly, this man was the Son of God!"

And the gift of Easter, to those who are open to receive it,
is a newfound ability to see this astounding reality:
that God has come into the world in the flesh of a man
and in that flesh has overcome the curse of sin and death.

The first gift of Easter is being able to see Jesus for who he truly is,
but in seeing Jesus our sight is restored
to be able to see the world in all of it's God given goodness and beauty,
to be able to see each person as the child of God that they are,
to be able to see each moment as a time that is full of God's presence.
We who have seen the Lord on Easter morning
are given Easter Eyes to see with in all of life.

When I was on sabbatical, summer before last,
I was riding with Mary Ellen and the kids in the back of a truck
through the Navajo reservation in Arizona.
It is a stunningly beautiful area,
with ever-changing shades of red, orange and brown
cliffs and buttes and mesas.
Sadly, though, right in the middle of the beautiful landscape,
is a massive power plant with chimney stacks
sending up plumes of smoke into the otherwise crystal blue sky.
The scene is such a jarring contrast that it was once a cover shot
for National Geographic magazine.
Langley was particularly troubled and became fixated on the blemish,
this man-made intrusion that marred the beauty of the horizon.
"Langley," I said, "the beauty is still there and we have to try to see it
despite the ugliness of the corruption."

It's like our all-too human lives -
there are corruptions that encroach upon the God-given landscape of our humanity.

Easter Eyes give us the ability to see the beauty that is still there
to see beyond the blemish and rejoice in the gifts of God that remain,
and to imagine the day when the Easter promise will be fulfilled,
and all corruption will be removed,
and all creation and every human life restored to our original beauty.
That is the vision we are given on Easter day.
But to see in such a way takes practice - it takes a lifetime of spiritual effort.

Poet Rainer Maria Rilke once went through a period of dryness in his life.
Nothing inspired him to write his poetry.
He sat with blank paper in front of his face and just grew depressed.
Life had lost its energy, its wonder, its joy.

A friend of his who was an artist, a painter, understood what had happened.
Rilke has lost his vision.
He could no longer see the wonder of the world around him.
He had lost his vision of the divine presence.
He could see only the surface of things.
You must recover your sight, said his friend.
You must look and look until you truly begin to see again.
He recommended Rilke go to the Paris Zoo and look at one animal every day
until he saw it.

So Rilke went to the zoo.
He decided to watch a panther in its pen,
so he sat and looked.
Day after day he returned, and he looked, and he tried to write about what he saw.

Finally, Rilke said, after writing 72 poems about the panther, "I truly saw it."
He actually saw the Panther in all its wild majestic glory.
It took sustained attention and effort - but God finally opened his eyes.¹

Mischa Berlinski and his family were in Haiti on January 12 with the earthquake struck.
In the first 24 hours after the Haitian disaster,
he heard no sirens and saw no helicopters flying overhead.
Instead he heard women praying and singing.
Port-au-Prince is a city of walls, he says, which came down in the quake,

¹ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (Boston: Conari Press, 1998), p. 22. The artist friend was sculptor Auguste Rodin, for whom Rilke was serving as secretary.

disclosing beauty not seen before - secret gardens and hidden terraces.
Initially Berlinski saw in the eyes of the people a sense of profound surprise,
a visage that in days would turn to weariness, despair, misery, grief,
but very often joy in the midst of the rubble,
as they discovered what remained after the quake.²

Joy in the midst of the rubble - that is what Easter eyes are able to see.
Often we must wait for it, long for it, even suffer in blindness for a while -
which is the point of the season of Lent,
and of the slow march of Holy Week.
But when the gift of sight is restored, there is great rejoicing, great celebration,
and the overflowing of grateful hearts.

Perhaps you have come today able to see the glory of the risen Christ,
and the beauty of Easter reality.
Or perhaps your horizon is filled with smokestacks
your heart weighted down with a great pile of rubble from an earthquake.
Your Lord is missing and you do not know where to find him.

Pray to God and ask for the grace of Easter eyes,
that you may look and truly perceive,
that you may see and behold the loving gaze of your risen Lord
as he tenderly calls you by name.

Amen.

² *New York Review of Books*, February 25.