

Rappahannock Christian Church – Easter Sunday, 4/24/11

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Communion Meditation

As I believe I've mentioned before, we gather here on the first day of every week in celebration of our Lord's resurrection. It was the very Early Christians who started this tradition and you might say that, since then, we've celebrated Easter every week.

Christ is the focus of our worship. We come to this Table every Sunday because He is the center of our celebration. I understand that some churches celebrate in this way once a month -- some even once a quarter -- but Disciples of Christ are unusual (among Protestants, anyway) in that we celebrate at the Lord's Table every week. Perhaps it seems over-much to those who are not used to it, but once you experience being fed at His Table each and every week it becomes an indispensable feature of worship.

These Elements represent His body and His blood, broken and spilled on Calvary. We receive cleansing and comfort, hope and forgiveness, along with a purpose for our life in Him.

Let me read to you the words of the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians about this Table:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Seeing is Believing

This morning's Scripture reading is from the Gospel recording according to John. We are going to read John 20:1-9. This is one of several accounts of the resurrection morning.

John 20:1-9 – Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!”

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

This story of the resurrection is about seeing. The words “see” and “saw” are used repeatedly throughout John's telling. There are two or three different Greek words for “to see” in this passage, and some scholars will argue that their usage, in themselves, point to different experiences. I'm not convinced that this is true. However, the context indicates very clearly that, while everyone in the story “sees,” not everyone sees with equal depth, especially at first.

It's sometimes amazing how little we actually “see”. I just finished a set of detective books by Tony Hillerman that take place in and around a Navaho reservation in Arizona. Sometimes the Navaho Tribal Policemen would come to a scene after the FBI. The FBI agents “saw”, but they

missed a lot, simply because they did not know Navaho culture. The tribal police would look at a scene and know immediately that some important article had been moved, or was missing, or didn't belong. They "saw" with true realization. They saw what was important, and it helped them to solve the crimes.

It's the same thing with a magician. He may be doing something important with his left hand while at the same time he makes some flashy move with his right. Your attention is drawn to his right hand, and so you don't take the slightest note of the really significant action. You "see" what he's doing -- or do you?!

This kind of thing happens so often in our lives! You know how you can drive by the home of that elderly person on your block, and you know they're really lonely and you should stop in, but it doesn't even register? You "see", but not really. What we see is, so often, only on the surface.

In the story we have before us we have Mary Magdalene and John (he is the "other disciple"). Mary "sees" and she is deeply troubled. What she sees is not what she expected. She expected to find Jesus' body, and wanted to do what the Law of Moses, and her love for her Lord, demanded. But she sees an empty tomb instead! Oh no! She is panicked! What have they done to Jesus now? So, she runs to Peter and John and they take off for the tomb to see for themselves. John (the younger of the two) outruns Peter in reaching the grave. He looks and also sees the empty tomb -- just as Mary said. But there still doesn't seem to be a realization on John's part of what has really happened.

Then Peter arrives. He goes right into the tomb. He sees the winding cloths lying there. He sees the headcloth neatly folded. I believe that in this moment, Peter *really sees*. I believe that he immediately realizes that no one has stolen the body. Who on earth would carefully unwrap a body and fold up the cloth if they were going to steal it? No! I believe that Peter realizes in this instant that Jesus has been raised from the dead. It's what Jesus himself had predicted, after all. Then it says that John went in (dragged in by an excited Peter, maybe?). It says that John then *saw*, and *believed*.

Now, of course, the disciples are only beginning to understand what God has done. Eventually they come to realize much, much more. They realize that Christ's death has actually made a full atonement for the sins of the world and that they personally have their own sins forgiven and now have eternal life. In *seeing* this, their lives are changed. They are never the same again.

It's the same today. Some still see only on the surface. Some see with understanding and believe.

How do you see the empty tomb? I hope that for you it is not "just" an empty tomb and a hollow event.

That empty tomb says that God died for you and that you can also be mended and He will give purpose to your life in Him. I urge you to see now, and believe.

Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. – 2 Corinthians 13:14