

I DON'T BELIEVE IT (Lindfield 21 April 2019)

LUKE 24: 1-12

"I have seen the Lord!" There's the sermon for today. Do I need to say any more? Lest the Treasurer thinks I am being paid under false pretences I had better say a bit more. It's hard to imagine a better sermon than Mary Magdalene's on that first Easter morning. Short, memorable and to the point. How many times have you gone home from Church saying you remember every word of the sermon? We need to say a bit more although we tend to try and say something profound on such occasions as this – as if the empty tomb was not profound enough in itself.

Mary's sermon is a gem – maybe the truest sermon ever preached. She doesn't say, "Christ is risen, He is risen indeed", but "I have seen the Lord". Resurrection is not a third person confession but a first person testimony – and this is all we need to preach. People don't want to hear that resurrection is a creed of the Church – they need to hear that the resurrection is a truth they might witness and to which they might give witness on a daily basis.

They need the invitation, the encouragement, the promise that they can say, "I have seen the Lord" in their own lives. This doesn't mean they have to find the tallest mountain, the busiest street corner or the jam packed mall and yell it out for every passer-by to hear. It doesn't mean evangelism as coercion, competition, certainty and beating the others down.

To say, "I have seen the Lord" is to point out resurrection in the midst of ruin; new life when all that seems visible is death; love in the face of hate; decency and goodness when that which is vitriolic and vile and vicious finds only more and more followers.

Because, in the end, resurrection is not only the promise of life after death, which, after all, would be enough, but also the assurance that the life-giving love of God will always move stones away. Tombs are just that – containers for the dead. And while we seem rather content these days with such spaces – those dead places that fuel corruption, deception, racism, sexism, suspicion, rejection, marginalisation, misogyny, judgment and fear – God continues to roll those stones away that keep life at bay. And when the stale air of decay meets God's breath that creates new life and the possibility of hope and peace, death truly is no more,

The promise of the resurrection is not only secure because God made it so by raising Jesus from the dead. The promise of the resurrection is certain when we speak in to our lives "I have seen the Lord" – words which roll back the stones that confine and constrain in order that all life might be free to know dignity, regard and respect.

"I have seen the Lord" insists that the ways of love will win out over ways of fear and hate. "I have seen the Lord" confirms that the truth of kindness will be heard over the din of ruthless, callous and vindictive rhetoric. "I have seen the Lord" gives witness to the fact there is another way of being in the world – a way of being that is shaped by resurrection that embodies anything and everything that is life-giving, a way of being that is so counter-cultural, so demonstrative of mercy, so exemplary of the truth of Easter that others will

listen to you, watch you, wonder about you and say, "Wait a minute. Did I just see the Lord?"

Not that the truth of the resurrection needs our action for verification. Not that the truth of the resurrection depends on our witness to convince others. Not that the truth of the resurrection relies on our willingness to speak words of life into conversations intent on destruction or our determination to free those captive to the deaths that our culture, our world, perpetuate. The truth of the resurrection is so regardless of our testimony. But, maybe, it will be more evident for each and every one of us if we can walk out of church on Easter morning and be willing to say, "I have seen the Lord", be willing to look for where we can say, "I have seen the Lord" in your life, or imagine those who might need us to say, "I have seen the Lord" because they cannot. And why can't they? Because they have known the walls of their tombs for too long.

True resurrection is the truth that the resurrection of Jesus indeed matters for our future, but even more so far as our present and for the sake of the present for others.

When Mary told the disciples they didn't believe her. They had to go and see for themselves.

For all the religious fervour of the day – the combination of Passover and the commotion caused by Jesus and the activities that surrounded these last few days, it was to those considered "outside" who understood. To those considered removed from God's favour – even God's salvation – that were the first to believe. Just like at Christmas where it was to shepherds and wise men from the East who came and worshiped the babe in the manger, so here and now, it is a Roman Centurion who could confess, "Truly He is the Son of God" and a women with a bad reputation who says, "I have seen the Lord". The message of Easter Day is that life and hope, peace and purpose are not just for some but for all. For we Gentiles, the message is ours to hear, to believe and to witness. "I have seen the Lord", "Truly He was the Son of God."

AMEN
