

Where is he?

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

That moment, after all the chaos. Mary first discovering the tomb empty. Still dark. She ran back to tell the disciples, and Peter and the Disciple that Jesus Loved raced one another to the tomb, each in turn peeking in. The beloved disciple believed – what, I'm not sure. But it is said just a little later, disciples locked in the room, they were in fear. So we are not sure about the men.

But Mary, she is crying, confused, and bumps into a gardener. This is what I, a modern seeker of Jesus, am wondering. Like Luke's Gospel story of Jesus appearing to two walking, grieving, along the road to Emmaus. They don't recognize him. There, it is when Jesus breaks bread with them, a sensory moment – that is when they see.

Mary, as dawn is breaking, hears Jesus speak her name. She sees, understands. The other friends of Jesus will need a bit more proof, holes in his hands. "That's ok." Said one person during our Zoom Easter study. "Science in our modern time requires us to seek proof."

It's true. But what of that sensory moment of experiencing Christ. Not an intellectual process, but experiencing...witnessing. In John's story, the Greek word for Mary's seeing is "idein"¹ which can also be translated "understanding". Earlier in John's Gospel Jesus uses the metaphor of a shepherd and their sheep to describe his relationship with believers. "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."² A sensory moment – hearing Jesus speak her name – Leads Mary to seeing, understanding resurrection.

Similar to the moment in Luke's Gospel after Jesus died, he appears to two sojourners walking to Emmaus. They don't at all recognize him, until, that is, He breaks bread with them; then they understand. Another sensory moment. Grief can cloud our senses – it takes a powerful experience to break into the bubble of grief that protects us.

Paul, the great inspirational, challenging letter writer to the Corinthian church that Suzanne also read from today, well, we know his story. His original persona, Saul, a zealous bully of followers of Jesus is knocked to the ground by an experience of the risen Christ.³ The play on the concept of seeing here too: though his eyes were open, he could see nothing...⁴

What is resurrection for you? Literal or figurative, whatever your interpretation, we miss the point if we stay in our heads. Sensory moments, especially finding the risen Christ today, circumvent our intellect and move us to understanding. Sheep knowing their shepherd's voice, only following that voice. Mary hearing her name, that unmistakable voice.

¹ Jin Young Choi. Commentary on John 20: 1-20., April 4, 2021. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/>

² John chapter 10. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A+11-18&version=NRSV>

³ The Book of Acts, chapter 9. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+9%3A+1-9&version=NRSV>

⁴ Ibid verse 8

In this scientific time when it is important to weed out the misinformation from facts around us, experiencing the Risen Christ is experience without filters. That is risky stuff, to just experience it, see, believe. But there it is.

Whether it is a startling experience in a moment of grief where you see, or hear, or smell perfume of someone you love who died. In my previous church we held an Easter sunrise service yearly. Regardless of the weather, we went out to the river nearby. That moment as dawn breaks, 30 of us freezing our buns off, but telling the story of Mary crying, grieving. "Where have you laid him?" Her vision clouded by tears. Then, dawn breaks, Jesus speaks, "Mary."

Well, that for me, that story told, year after year, has triggered over and over again what Celtic spirituality calls an experience of a *Thin Place*;⁵ A moment when the barrier between the holy and us disappears. A sensory experience. Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

⁵ Fr Richard Rohr discusses Thin Places: <http://www.thinplace.net/2011/03/richard-rohr-celts-didnt-invent-thin.html>