

## Easter Sunday Sermon

The resurrection is the foundation of our faith. It is crucial to Christianity that Jesus is risen and is alive today.

I wonder though how often we might feel insecure about the quality of our own believing. How often we worry that we have questions. How often we worry that we don't understand enough.

For me, John's resurrection account speaks directly to the nature of our believing. Our gospel reading for today rejects the notion that faith comes in only one shape, or size, or pattern. Jesus is risen. John's Gospel could hardly be clearer on that point. Jesus' tomb is empty, as Mary, Simon Peter, and John, the Beloved Disciple can see. The risen Jesus appears in person to Mary, then later the same day to his disciples (with the exception of Thomas), eight days later to Thomas, and then to another group of his disciples. For John's Gospel there's no question concerning Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is risen.

Nevertheless, the risen Jesus' appearance is not a simple thing. The story makes it clear that Jesus is risen, but if we consider the markedly diverse experiences of Mary, Peter, and the one John calls the Beloved Disciple, we can see that their faith experiences are different.

On that first Easter Sunday Mary visits Jesus' tomb. She sees that the stone that closed off the tomb from the outside has been taken away, and she draws a conclusion. Running to Peter and that Beloved Disciple, she says, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb!" Mary sees the empty tomb, but she does not yet believe.

Later Mary looks into the tomb, where she sees two angels. She then sees Jesus but fails to recognize him: "Lord," she says, "if you have carried him away..."- Only then, when Jesus calls her name, does Mary come to believe and says "I have seen the Lord!".

Things go no more smoothly for Peter. Alerted by Mary, he and the Beloved Disciple run to the tomb. Peter enters the tomb first, where he sees Jesus' burial garments but Peter does not yet believe.

The Beloved Disciple, however, outruns Peter to the tomb. He peeps in and sees the linen cloths. He allows Peter to enter the tomb ahead of him. But when the Beloved Disciple enters the tomb, we are told, "He saw and believed".

The Beloved Disciple sees and believes. Mary sees yet needs help believing. Peter sees, but he does not yet believe. Peter will come to faith in time. The Gospel story judges none of these people. John includes the stories of Mary, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple without evaluation or assessment. All three come to faith. Believing – having faith- takes its own shape in each instance.

If I had to understand the "inner workings" of everything, I would be in big trouble. Electricity, for example. Perhaps you know all of the "ins and outs" of the miracle of electricity—I definitely do not. I have a basic understanding—you flick the switch and the lights come on or the TV comes on. That's enough for me.

The same goes for understanding how an airplane can fly at 33,000 feet; how a computer works, I could go on.

We live in a world where we exercise faith constantly in so many areas of our lives.

When we don't understand something, what do we do? I think we have two options – We can shake our heads and declare it as impossible, or, we can choose to declare that we believe it! Do I really understand how Jesus could be dead and then resurrected? No I don't – it's way beyond my understanding. Do I have faith that this happened. Yes I do. It's not blind faith – the accounts show that the risen Jesus appeared to more than 500 people on 12 separate occasions. I have felt the presence of Jesus on different occasions – sometimes when praying, when worshipping. Can I be sure how this happens – no but if you take the element of faith from me and you take God from me. Take God away from me and you take Jesus away and I have a scary world to face without someone who never leaves me and who loves me without question. Take away my faith and there is no hope of seeing past the ugliness of this world and no hope of ultimate victory.

Faith means putting confidence in the things we hope for, the things we can't see. Jesus talked about having faith as small as a mustard seed. We all have our different faith stories. Some have a date where they can say that on that date, following that experience they believed. Some will say they always believed. For some faith grew quickly. For some faith grew or is growing slowly. John's Gospel shows that we can all have different faith experiences and that is ok. So, whatever your story, if you choose to have faith in the resurrection, in the risen Jesus, you can have hope. The tomb is empty. Jesus is risen.

***This was the sermon given at the 8am service on Easter Sunday by Danielle Brown***