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## Arrogant Eye, Loving Eye

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn given on the Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021*

*Earth Day Luke 24:36-48*

Happy Third Sunday of Easter! Happy Earth Day! Happy gathering together in person!

Today is the Third Sunday of the great 50 days of Eastertide. Did you know that Easter is a whole season and not just not a day? This is true for lots of reasons, but it's mostly because the resurrection of Jesus turned so much upside down that it's not possible to see it all in a day. As Mariann Budde said in her Easter sermon, "Resurrection is a process, not an event."

So in the middle of this process, this season of coming to recognize new life in the midst of death and love arising undefeated out of hate and violence, we are also experiencing some things that can give you whiplash in our world. This week we honor Earth Day. We see COVID vaccinations AND cases rising. And our city is anguished by the killing of 20 year old Daunte Wright in Minneapolis, and on edge about the closing arguments this coming week in the trial of Officer Chauvin, not to mention the video of the shooting of 13 year old Adam Toledo in Chicago, and the mass shooting in Indianapolis on Thursday. And the kids are back in school and everyone is still coping with the joys and burdens you always carry. It is just all so much.

I do sometimes debate about mentioning these things in sermons. Do we have to bring the newspaper to the pulpit? Isn't Church a place for sanctuary and joy? Yes, it is. But Christian faith has always looked death and evil and violence square in the face, because that is what Jesus did. Resurrection follows crucifixion, but doesn't take it away. And so we in our faith can look at what is happening in the world directly, but differently, with hope and love. We look at all this through the lens of Jesus' death and resurrection.

All of the gospels tell different stories of how the disciples learned to recognize the resurrected Jesus, learning the true source of their hope. Resurrection is the beautiful reality that God's life and justice and love always arise out of the ashes of death and violence, if only we have eyes to see this and surrender our will and our lives to it.

As the Bible describes it, after the resurrection there were some things that changed, and some things that stayed the same. What was the same is that Jesus' mission is to proclaim God's love and freedom for embodied lives on earth: especially the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed, which includes the natural world, creation. Jesus enables us to love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. None of that has changed.

What has changed was the shape of the disciples' hope. They had hoped that Jesus would be the one to restore the kingdom of Israel. That God would in effect impose from above the order they wanted on earth.

What they received instead was the power of the Holy Spirit, the very creative power of the universe, so that they could enact from the ground, in real time, the Beloved Community, the kingdom of God among messy fallible living creatures.

So the resurrection is partly about changing the shape and source of our hope, changing how we see. And it's about the uprising of an utterly different way of doing and being that we call the Way of Love. I believe with all my heart that what most needs healing in us is to allow God to transform us from seeing the world with self at the center, from a hyper-individual point of view in terms of how everything affects me, and instead to perceive with the eye of love. It's to move from seeing with a subject-object lens, to seeing with a subject-subject lens, to see *I and Thou* as Jewish theologian Martin Buber described it. This changes so much. It means recognizing all of life as innately valuable regardless of how it benefits anything else. This is what it means to love our neighbors, including our flora and fauna neighbors, as ourselves: to see them as subjects. This is what God did as creation was happening—to gaze at it each day, to call it simply “Good.” This shift is part of what many wisdom traditions call enlightenment, and this perception can't happen with the mind alone; it must begin with the heart.

There is a wonderful theologian named Sallie McFague who passionately advocates for a Christian Nature Spirituality. She talks about moving from seeing human and nonhuman life with an arrogant eye, and instead seeing it with a loving eye.

The arrogant eye sees a forest in terms of timber or, more subtly, how good it will make me feel; the loving eye is the one who delights in a spruce sapling or an old growth pine with whiskey jacks in its branches or the amazing purple of mushrooms. The arrogant eye values the female body primarily for the pleasure or profit it will bring, regardless of her wellbeing or sometimes even consent; the loving eye delights in the uniqueness of each embodied person, and in particular of the body of one's beloved. The arrogant eye believes that we need to drill for oil or mine for diamonds wherever they can be found, because these are resources for lives and convenience and to create jobs and industry. The loving eye recognizes that for the poor to have enough to eat, the natural world must be healthy; and for the natural world to be healthy, the rich need to change our lifestyles and the demands that fuel corporate and political choices. The loving eye can see that the false narrative of endless progress is only devouring the life of the planet like the ebola virus devours the tissues in a body and eventually kills it.

How do we move from the arrogant eye to the loving eye? How do we love our neighbors as ourselves? How do we honor both Earth Day and racial justice and healing and following Jesus' Way of Love in our families? It's not by over-efforting or shaming ourselves. We can move from the arrogant eye to the loving eye by moving in, slowing down, consciously allowing ourselves to be de-centered, and savoring the details. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves; but how can we love whom we don't know? And how shall we know each other except through the slow delight of paying attention?

And who knew that paying attention could be so delightful?

My husband Jeff has always been kind of a dog whisperer. He always had dogs growing up. In fact, for a while he volunteered at a humane society working with dogs who had behavior problems, to teach them to trust humans again. They had automatic fear reactions around people, like barking or biting or peeing that made them unadoptable and slated for euthanasia. He helped them by simply sitting in their presence, without coming toward them, without standing over them, without having a loud voice or sudden movements. He showed them that he could simply be with them and that they could trust he would not hurt him. He did not see them with an arrogant eye, but with a loving eye. Even though he worked with dogs who sometimes would bite, he said he was never afraid of them. Because he saw them with a loving eye and knew they were just afraid.

To engage the loving eye that de-centers yourself, to allow the resurrection like an uprising to catch you up and transform you, try the surprisingly enjoyable relief of letting go of all the commentary in your head and just noticing things instead. What really delights your child? Why does your teenager laugh so hard at those Tik-Toks he watches? What is your cousin really saying about the last presidential election? Why is your plant at home growing in such a strange angle – can you see that it is alive and obviously so hungry for light? See that the earth matters. See how breathtaking each life form is. See that black lives matter. See that all of life cannot be valued until every life is valued.

Beginning right now, take a minute to look around, if you'd like. Really see everything and everyone as if for the first time. Allow yourself playfully to be de-centered. Just imagine the world from the point of view of someone in your family, of that tree, of a stranger across the park from you. What would it really mean to look at them, not with an arrogant eye, but with a loving eye? What is their relationship with God? How do they see you? What if a vast kindness and curiosity could arise between you?

The love of God in the risen Christ is powerful enough to split us open to make this shift, this shift from the arrogant eye to the loving eye. We can't accomplish this on our own any more than we can make resurrection happen, but with God, all things are possible. The shift from arrogant to loving eye captures the transformation at the heart of Christian faith, the thread that ties together our personal lives and the systemic change we seek for racial justice and environmental justice and all our other needs for healing. Let us see with the eyes of Christ. Let us recognize the innate value of this Earth and the natural world of which we are a part. Let us follow the Way of Love beginning with how we see. God will show us, step by step, how to make change from there. **Amen.**