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## Seeing with Easter Eyes

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsobn given on Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021*

*John 20:1-18*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Today is a good day. It's a good day for so many reasons. First and for us most important, this is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. This is the day that we celebrate that death is not ultimate. Violence and the crushing powers of empire do not have the last word. The love of God creates new life, always, every time. Today is about resurrection.

It's a good day for other reasons. This is the first time we have gathered together in person since last October, and the second time we've gathered in person since the pandemic began more than one year ago. It is so very wonderful to see all your beautiful faces in person. We get to gather around the Lord's Table today. We still miss so greatly those who can't yet be here in person. We so yearn for the time there will be no restrictions on how and when we see each other. But to see each other today in this beautiful sunshine is really, really good.

Today is also the last and most significant of the Jewish Passover, THE day when they were liberated from slavery in Egypt. Easter and Passover are usually in similar timeframes in the spring, but rarely are they so perfectly aligned. So today is also about liberation.

And today is also the sixty-third anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in Memphis. This weekend is a pause after the first week of the trial of Officer Derek Chauvin, whose killing of George Floyd last May lit an international movement of waking up to the profound extent of continued systemic racism in our country. This led St. John's to center the work of racial justice and healing in our community, as an essential part of following Jesus' Way of Love in Minneapolis in 2021.

Today all these things are aligning. It is an important day, a beautiful day, and on this day I believe with all my heart that what God is most inviting from us is to finally *see*. Let me explain.

Some of you have been at the virtual Healing Prayer Tent that happens every day at 8am over Zoom for the duration of the trial of Derek Chauvin. This is a continuation of last summer's outdoor Healing Prayer Tent in North Minneapolis, and every day there is a brief reflection by faith or community leader. This is a space where we are pulling together faith and concern for the world, contemplation and action. On Friday, Good Friday, I had the honor to give the reflection. I spoke about how the dying Jesus, on the cross, asked his mother Mary to look at his disciple John and to see a son, and for John to look at Mary and see a mother. Jesus is teaching us to see love and compassion and interconnectedness even all the way up until the end of his life. It reminded me of Darnella Frazier, who was a bystander watching George Floyd being killed and a witness at the trial, saying that when she looked at George Floyd, she saw her dad, her brother, her uncles. On Good Friday I spoke about how critical it is for us all to truly, in our bodies, see each other as family—not as an idea but as something so deep and instinctive that it would cause us to do what Jonathan Daniels did way

back in 1965, when he jumped in front of a bullet aimed at his Black friend Ruby Sales, simply because he loved her. So there is that kind of seeing that is central to who we are as followers of Jesus' Way of Love, that is so critical to healing racism and division in our country.

But today on Easter Sunday, we are asked to learn yet another kind of seeing. And that seeing is to recognize the presence of the risen Christ when all we expect is death and loss.

In the story from John's gospel today, we see the resurrection through the eyes of those who were closest to Jesus. First there is Mary Magdalene, who arrives in the dark before the sunrise to care for Jesus' body, as soon as the sabbath was over. All she sees is that he is gone. When she goes to get Peter and John, they enter the tomb and find only carefully folded graveclothes. The story says something curious: they believed, but they did not yet understand. I would go so far as to say they didn't yet see. So they just go home.

But Mary Magdalene will not leave. It is unthinkable for her to leave. Like a mother holding her dead child in her arms, refusing to let it go; like so many who have lost those closest to them, nothing in them will yet allow a separation. And so it is that Mary alone is the first to see Jesus.

But she doesn't recognize him. Scripture doesn't tell us why, but in my imagination it's because in no part of the world as she knew could he be there. So she doesn't see him. What helps Mary to recognize Jesus is when he calls her by name. She knew that sounded like, she had heard it many times before, and so she stops, turns, and her eyes are opened. She finally sees her beloved, right there.

This past year we have been through a lot. There has been the pandemic and the isolation and loss of income and stress and loneliness. There was everything we already all carry in our personal lives. We saw George Floyd be killed and the country erupt, and we have been learning, especially those of us in the Sacred Ground curriculum, about the full extent of racism in our country, which is so far beyond what at least I was taught, and in which I am complicit. And there are many other things we care deeply about that concern us. This fragile earth, our island home, and climate change, and the election, and on and on. It is sometimes hard to see past all of that loss and trauma. It's hard to move past where Mary Magdalene was, weeping that things could never go back to the way they were. I know that this year has been hard for all of us. If you'd be willing, I'd like to ask you to get in touch with the things that have been hardest for you this year. If you can, recognize how those things have felt not just in your emotions but also in your body.

Mary was focused on that feeling in HER body, and her pain was the only thing she could see. And yet, there was Jesus right in front of her. What helped Mary truly see him, truly open her eyes not just to the loss but to his presence right on front of her, was three things. She stopped. She turned. And she listened.

Whatever you've been experiencing, whatever that feeling is in your body, I invite you to allow yourself to be interrupted. To stop. To do what we talked about a few weeks ago, and let your pain fall to the earth like a grain of wheat. To open your fists and let it be.

And then, we get to engage that first practice in Jesus' Way of Love, which is to turn. What we are turning toward is the presence of Jesus saying our name. That exists somewhere in your life, and it is probably right in front of you. Are you listening? Can you recognize it? For me one of those things has been the virtual healing prayer tent. We are connecting across racial, geographic and religious lines of difference and holding silence for one another's stories, our reflections and insights, and lifting up the welfare of this City we love to the God we love. We are being the thing we are praying for. The presence of Christ is as powerful there as it has been anywhere I have seen.

On Good Friday a number of us joined St. Matthews in St. Paul to do a walking stations of the cross service outdoors, making stops to pray for the earth, the Chinese students at the university nearby, for the neighborhood and the world, and finally we ended at the memorial of Philando Castile, who was killed by a police officer in 2016. After Philando's mother spoke and prayed with us, another woman, a Black woman who had been a police officer, got up and prayed too—for the police. When those who have every right to hate instead bring forth love, a miracle happens, the impossible stands right in front of you, and suddenly the dream of God shines in your heart's vision and is enacted in this world, right here.

There are many other signs of Christ's presence, in each and every place in our lives, including the most difficult. To have Easter eyes is to be able to recognize the presence of the risen Christ right in front of us, when all we have been seeing is loss and trauma. It's to turn all these negatives into a real and lasting positive that isn't wishful thinking but full of the power of God the Creator, the God who is love. It's to see the kingdom

of heaven all around us, to recognize its signs as Jesus taught us. It's to see what Dr. King did when he talked about being to the mountaintop and seeing to the other side, just the day before he died sixty-three years ago today.

Like Mary Magdalene, when the risen Christ speaks your name, let's let ourselves stop, turn, and listen to his presence. Then, at last, we are able to see. Then the impossible becomes possible. Then in us is born the creative power of God to love even those who appear not to deserve it. Including even ourselves. Then the confidence that comes from the love that is stronger than death is born in us, and we can bear anything, because we know and have seen that the nightmare will not, will never, have the last word.

The sprouts of the kingdom of God are pushing up from the earth, and the leaves of Beloved Community are unfurling from the trees, and the buds of Jesus' nonviolent Way of Love are emerging from the life of the now. Can you see them? Can you see past the nightmare we have been living, and share God's dream of Beloved Community?

Trust this. Hold on to hope. Stop, turn, and listen. Hear Jesus speaking your name in the garden you thought was only a tomb. See what you thought was impossible.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!