



We Seek Not Something, but Someone

Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn on Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

John 20:1-18

This is the first time we've had Easter together in person in three years. Let's do this again, Alleluia! Christ is risen!

I want to acknowledge those who are here in person. Each of you is priceless, a gift from God. I want to acknowledge each of you who are joining us over the internet. COVID did at least help us figure out how to livestream, more or less. Each of you is priceless, a gift from God. And I want to acknowledge our loved ones who were with us three years ago the last time we did this but who now exist within the vastness of God's Holy Mystery, united with the presence and love of God, who are also each priceless, a gift from God. Don Hawkinson. Claudia Murray. Russ Bremner. Christina Huck. Linda Anderson. Bob Harvey. Rex Gaskill. Lillian Gavitt. So many whom we love but see no longer. They are here with us, in our hearts, in our memories, in the shattering insistence of Easter that death does not have the last word.

Even though Easter is all about joy, it doesn't start there. It begins with Mary weeping in the garden. Her grief for her Beloved is absolute. She could do absolutely nothing to prevent his suffering or death but there was just one thing she could do, to care for his body. And even that was stolen from her. She didn't care who this gardener was who was standing in front of her, she just wanted to get Jesus' body back.

When Jesus said her name and she recognized him, I can only imagine her shock, and joy, and maybe also a terrible hesitation to hope that he was really live, in case it was a dream. I imagine her throwing her arms around him and sobbing. I'm sure her arms would not peel themselves off him, they just refused. Because there was no way he could be there. But he was.

Yet he was there in a way that she could not possess. She could not own him or cage him or keep him. He was there in the overflowing power of a love that knew no bounds, that was so deep and so broad it was bigger than every other human experience. Can you own the Grand Canyon? Can you hold the ocean? In the Holy Mystery we call God, the meaning of Jesus, and resurrection, and Easter is that the deepest reality is a fusion of life and love that is indestructible, that expresses itself in this physical world and in the connection, the ubuntu, between all things. Easter cannot be understood. It was meant to be experienced, and not just by Mary in the garden. This is what we at church are all about. It's the whole purpose of us being here at all.

Yet this deepest reality, this fusion of life and love, this presence we call the risen Christ, is only recognizable a little at a time. Mary Magdalene didn't recognize Jesus until he called her by name. Peter and John were so focused on what they could understand—the graveclothes, the missing body—that they apparently ran right past Jesus in the garden and the angels in the tomb too. Later that same evening, Jesus also appears to the disciples in a locked room where they are grieving and traumatized. When they see him they are terrified and don't believe it's him until he shows them his wounds. The disciples on the road to Emmaus feel their hearts burning but their eyes don't open until Jesus breaks the bread like he always did. It seems that resurrection and hope and life happen less like waving a magic wand and more like the slow onset of spring—often, like this year, way too slowly.

Speaking of spring, if you'll let me digress a little, I have not been much of a gardener in my life, but the pandemic changed all that. We spent so much time at home we really got to know our backyard. Our daughter Carly even named the squirrels who live in our red oak trees—Buffy, Sniper, Erik the Red, and Midnight. We tried to create some native perennial gardens, but they just ended up being a riot of tangled prairie plants we called the Bug Jungles. This spring I wanted to try again. St. John's member Courtney Hammond is an excellent gardener and she also works close to my house, so last week I asked her to swing by so I could show her our yard and ask her questions.

What amazed me is that as we walked around our yard, Courtney could identify our bushes even though they had zero leaves on them. Just plants with brown twigs, and she knew what they were. Spirea. Burning bush. Hydrangea. Courtney has spent time paying attention to these living beings who are our plant neighbors, and she loves them, so she notices and recognizes them. When we went to our bug jungles which to me just looked like a lot of “winter interest” (meaning dead stalks and leaves I hadn't cleaned up yet), Courtney pointed out something I had never noticed at all, which is that we have a lot of thyme plants growing and thriving under last year's dead leaves. Thyme, as in the spice you put in soups. I only knew how to recognize thyme by its smell and by the way it looks in those plastic containers you buy at the grocery store. But Courtney knew thyme as a living being, a plant. She picked a stem and I smelled it and sure enough, I did know it. It's thyme. I was delighted.

The angels and Jesus in today's story asked the disciples and Jesus who they were looking for. They didn't ask them, “what are you looking for?” but “who?” Courtney recognized these plants in my backyard because she knows them as living things and loves them. I believe we are not looking for *something*, but *someone*. When we

realize that, our perception changes. As Heidi said in her sermon last night, we can rest, because it turns out we do not find Jesus. He finds us. He has been there all along.

The risen Christ exists within each one of us, and in the fabric of love, the DNA of reality that knits us together. Where is Jesus? He is sitting right next to you. In our baptismal covenants we say that we seek and serve Christ in all persons. He is within you, looking out of your eyes at your neighbors and loved ones. If Christ is the presence of God made manifest in physical reality, then in some sense he is even growing in your garden. We can meet him at his table, and in fact anywhere and everywhere we go.

Let spring come to your soul, to your heart. Wake up. So much is possible that we never even dreamed. The risen Christ may be hard to recognize. Things in this world, even church, are changing and different. There is no way to get back to the place we were before. Jesus was not resuscitated—he rose from the dead in a new form that could not be contained. And in that new form, in the assurance that God is with us, the risen Christ finds us. Each of us, our lives and relationships, our church and our world, is being made new in the midst of our losses. Out of the dead of winter, spring comes. Christ is present, Christ is risen, Alleluia. Amen.