



## Easter Day (A)

### Resurrection Vision

**[RCL]: Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10**

“Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

A joy-filled proclamation. A mystery we don’t “get,” can’t “get,” weren’t designed to “get,” and yet it rings true to our world-weary, sin-sick souls.

“Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia...” We can’t say it enough. It is the balm in Gilead, the water to a parched tongue, the stream in the desert, the light at the end of the tunnel. “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.

How different this joyful exclamation is from the words the risen Jesus heard from Mary Magdalene: “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

You see, Mary was caught up in some serious grief – and, frankly, trauma. Her mind is stuck in a frantic loop: Where is he? Where is he? Where is he? The first time she says this is after she runs to the disciples’ safehouse to report this newest insult: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

The second time, she says she can’t see straight because of the wave of disorienting grief. She is turned in on herself. You’ve been there, I bet. She misses the angels, dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been laid. “Woman,” they ask, “why are you weeping?”

“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

And then she senses another person behind her and turns around. Her grief is like a centripetal force, turning her in on herself, blinding her to capital-r Reality, trapped in grief, in thinking nothing would ever be okay again.

She assumes this man is the gardener, maybe even the thief: “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” The first words spoken to the resurrected Christ certainly are a long way from how we greet him today: “Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.”

You see, Mary was caught up in crucifixion vision.

Crucifixion vision afflicts most of us much of the time. It is a way of seeing and perceiving the world that makes us think that Sin and Death are in charge. Crucifixion vision tricks us into wanting to go back to the past, to the good old days, as though the human condition has taken a dramatic plunge off the deep end since we were children. Crucifixion vision is what fuels our greed – we can never have quite enough to really be “financially secure,” can we? Crucifixion vision is what binds us in sadness when we take everything personally and think that we are responsible for everyone else’s well-being.

Crucifixion vision assumes that nothing will ever change in our politics, that the partisan divide is too great, that the world is divided between the elites and deplorables, between the haves and the have-nots, between the workers and the owners, between the educated and the uneducated, between worthy and unworthy. Crucifixion vision says the world is filled with winners and losers, firsts and lasts, and we’d better do everything we can to be winners. Crucifixion vision assumes death is really the end, so we’d better stuff our lives with as much stuff, as much pleasure, as much happiness as we can, and try to postpone death as long as possible with whatever means are available.

Mary was caught up in crucifixion vision, and we can understand that; Jesus had died. She was in blaming mode: Who took his body?! She was paralyzed and stuck. She couldn’t get up and leave the scene, like Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. She didn’t have access to wonder and curiosity about why the linen cloths were rolled up so nicely in the corner of the tomb. Mary was trapped by crucifixion vision, like most of us are, most of the time. So much so that she couldn’t see the angels in front of her. Mary couldn’t even recognize the resurrected Christ in her midst.

Until... until...

“Mary... Mary...”

Until she heard her name. “Do not hold on to me... but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” And then her crucifixion vision fell away, like the scales on St. Paul’s eyes, and she saw for the first time with resurrection vision.

Resurrection vision is bigger than crucifixion vision. It overtakes it. It redeems it. Resurrection vision is looking away from ourselves and all of our problems to take in the beauty of a flower or the sunrise or the subtle sensation of breath – inhale and exhale – giving us life. Resurrection vision enables us to trust that all things – all things! – work together for good for those who are called to God’s purposes. Resurrection vision knows that joy comes in the morning, even though weeping is spending the night. Resurrection vision sees the burning, falling spire of Notre Dame and wonders what new thing God is doing, grateful that the French people, as secular as they are, remember and take comfort in singing the great hymns of the faith.

Resurrection vision is always open to being surprised by God because our resurrection God is a God of surprises. Surprise! God often uses the least qualified, least educated, least righteous, least “good” people to be

his ministers in the world; just ask Moses, a man who had a fear of public speaking. Just ask the boy David, the youngest of all the brothers who used a slingshot and a pebble to defeat evil. Just ask King David, after he experiences God's mercy, post-*rendezvous* with Bathsheba. Just ask Paul, who had been a violent persecutor of Jesus' Way.

Crucifixion vision sees nothing but a single, dead grain of wheat, thinking, "Surely, that won't be enough." Resurrection vision waits for the surprise: now the green blade riseth from the buried grain, with bread for the world.

The only kind of vision God has is resurrection vision. God sent his only Son into the world, not to condemn the world – that's crucifixion vision – but that the world might be redeemed through him. Surprise!

You see, if you only have crucifixion vision, you can't see the surprise. You can't even wait for the surprise. You can't trust that the surprise is happening, here, now, by definition, beyond all you can ask or imagine.

But if you have resurrection vision, you know that with God, all things are possible. You know you aren't the center of the universe. You know that love wins. You know that there are no more haves and have-nots, Republicans or Democrats, mountain people or beach people, rich or poor, slave or free, Jew or Greek, black or white. We are all *one* in Christ.

But here is the really good news. If you can't seem to fix your vision – if the optometrist is closed and the readers are sold out Wal-Mart and the ophthalmologist isn't on your insurance plan – God fixes it for you. God will seek you out, just as he did the lost sheep, the slaves in Egypt, the woman at the well. God will seek you out and remind you that you don't have to, you can't, in fact, you weren't meant to "hold on," because God is holding on to you. God is drawing you up from the grave, offering you free cataract surgery or just an updated eyeglass prescription – whatever it is that you need to see straight, to see with resurrection eyes.

It might take a while for you to see as God sees, to love as God loves. Remember that story in Mark where Jesus spits into his hands smears it on the blind man's eyes? At first, the people looked like trees, so Jesus laid his hands on him again. And then his sight was clear. It might take a little time, a few tries – but friends, rest assured – God is at work, in our midst, meeting you just where you are, holding you, healing you and indeed the whole of creation, so we can see through resurrection eyes.

Surprise.

*The Rev. Joslyn Ogden Schaefer serves as the Rector of Grace Church in the Mountains, in Waynesville, NC. She has degrees from Davidson College, University of Edinburgh and Episcopal Divinity School. In this phase of life, most of her discretionary time is lovingly devoured by small children. Her two primary spiritual disciplines are child-rearing and sermon-writing, and she is regularly humbled by both.*