

03.31.24 ~ Easter Sunday

“I Have Seen the Lord!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 46 (NRSVUE)

God's Defense of His City and People; To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to Alamo. A Song.

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice; the earth melts.
- ⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations;
I am exalted in the earth.”
- ¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

John 19:37-42 (CEB)

³⁷ And another scripture says, *They will look at him whom they have pierced.*

Jesus' body is buried.

³⁸ After this Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take away the body of Jesus. Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one because he feared the Jewish authorities. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took the body away. ³⁹ Nicodemus, the one who at first had come to Jesus at night, was there too. He brought a mixture of myrrh and aloe, nearly seventy-five pounds in all. ⁴⁰ Following Jewish burial customs, they took Jesus' body and wrapped it, with the spices, in linen cloths. ⁴¹ There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish Preparation Day and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus in it.

Leader: These Are Words and Actions of Love. All: Thanks be to God!

John 20:1-18 (NIV)

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Leader: These Words of Jesus Are for Us, Church. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Omnipotent God, we praise you and your sacrificial love. We thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to teach us, lead us, and suffer for us. As we heard the stories through Holy Week, we rejoice at the resurrection outcome, even if we struggle to hear your voice and feel your presence some days. Let us be strong and faithful like Mary of Magdala. Help us to hear words of wisdom from you today. Thank you, Lord, for this woman’s testimony and may we be good examples of your humble yet extravagant generosity. Please speak through this messenger now. Amen.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed –
Hallelujah! And Happy Easter! Lent is over; we've been in reflection for forty (40) days, then had a lovely lunch together, communion representing Christ's body and blood in the bread and juice, then journeyed to the cross through the Gospel of John, hearing how Jesus was sent by God the Father to be the light of the world, yet was abandoned by his disciples, betrayed by his disciple Judas, denied by his disciple Peter three times, arrested and tried before Pilate, then Herod Antipas, then killed on the cross and buried in a tomb. Today, after so much sadness, we welcome Mary Magdalene's good news: "I have seen the Lord!" With our 20/20 hindsight from reading both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures in our Bibles, we know, celebrate, and sing that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave!

It is hard to find beauty in the crucifixion, so we will find beauty in all of today, Resurrection Sunday. But the first two passages we read are necessary before the best news of all. Let us recall what we heard in Psalm 46 when we are in turmoil or despair: "¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult." Although Jesus even warned his disciples that he was going somewhere they could not go and that he would suffer, his humanity still had to bear anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane as he was preparing to face the agony of the cross. I wonder if Jesus drew on Psalm 46 or other encouraging psalms of hope as he cried out in the Garden for the disciples to stay awake with him, and asked God to take the cup of suffering away as he sweated

blood. While he was flogged and placed under arrest and faced the jeers of the crowd screaming “Crucify Him,” I wonder if he recalled these phrases of Psalm 46: “¹⁰ ‘Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.’¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Only the kindness and love of two secret disciples Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus could treat Jesus so royally in death as we have heard the Scriptures convey this morning. Normally, criminals would have stayed hanging on the crosses as deterrent symbolism, but because it was Passover, they were allowed to remove Jesus’ body for burial outside the city. He was placed in a new tomb in a manicured garden with nearly seventy-five (75) pounds of spices and herbs around his body; they wrapped him in expensive linen cloth out of respect.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene had stood at the cross during the ordeal. Remember her? Jesus had healed her body and mind of seven (7) demons (Mark 16:9, Luke 8:1-3), so in her gratitude, she loved and loyally followed him thereafter, even though men and women travelling together was not acceptable. In today’s world, Mary of Magdala may have been schizophrenic, had obsessive compulsive disorder, epilepsy, bipolar disorder, or been addicted to substances. We do not have Scriptural evidence that she was a prostitute, although some scholars believe prostitution was one way she could have supported herself and Jesus’ ministry. We do know that before she met Jesus, she was isolated and ill. We also know that she became a leader among the women and one of his first few named female disciples.

As we read, after a few days early in the morning, she went to the tomb bringing with her more herbs and spices to clean and dress Jesus’

body. She must not have thought about how she would gain access since there was a huge stone closing off the tomb; but as she arrived the tomb was open, and Jesus' body was gone! She went to get Peter and John, who followed her there and saw only the cloth from around his head and the linen that had covered his body. They pondered this fearfully, and went back to where they were staying, while Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb and wept.

Then John's Gospel tells us of her personal encounter with her Lord, Jesus. First the two angels appeared to comfort and perhaps inform her, a woman of ill reputation! That alone is a miracle – angels only appeared to those called by God, like Gabriel to Mary, the mother of Jesus, to her betrothed, Joseph, and a host of angels to the shepherds and wise men. Then Mary sees a rough, dirty male figure with scars that she presumes to be the gardener or custodian. All ask her why she is crying, and she confesses she does not know where they have taken her Lord's body. After the man gently calls her by name, she realizes it is Jesus, and runs to embrace him, but he stops her because he has not yet risen to his father in heaven.

Even though she was already a believer, this was a life-transforming experience, and I imagine that Mary chose her words very carefully: **I have seen the Lord!** Think about it with different emphases on each word. I, a woman of ill repute, have actually witnessed a holy act of God! I, a woman of no value, just property, was chosen to be the first witness of everlasting life and a witness to the proof he is the Messiah! I, a woman who had been possessed by demons, saw the man who cured me from evil and sin. Then the word “**have**” means to possess, own, accept,

or experience. “I **have** seen the Lord!” She not only experienced this miracle, but she owns her part in it; she accepts this vision as he tenderly speaks her name and possesses the knowledge that he was her rabbi teacher who has been resurrected from death. And then, she sees his figure with her own eyes! “I have **seen** the Lord!” No one can question her testimony now that she is healed – she did not hear the voices of schizophrenia or hallucinate from addiction – she actually saw and heard the risen Christ! That speaks to the authority of God to make himself known through Jesus and her witness of seeing him with her eyes. And then she calls him “**Lord.**” Jesus hinted to the disciples, the woman at the well, and to some he cured that he was the prophesied Messiah, and to Martha of Bethany, Lazarus’ sister who surely knew Mary of Magdala, he directly asked her if she believed he could really help her dead brother:

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “*I am* the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world (Matthew 11:25-27 ^{NRSVUE}).”

Mary Magdalene had heard stories of his Messiahship from the Psalms and the Isaiah scrolls, but **this** experience granted her authority to declare it! “I have seen the **Lord!**” It is he, who he said he was, who cured me, and who will save sinners, even though he died on the cross like a common criminal. The Messiah lives! That is the beauty of both the cross and the resurrection – that Jesus is alive!

Can you imagine trying to understand this miracle? Jesus trusted this friend, a woman of strong faith to deliver his message to the other disciples. It is fitting to celebrate her work as a loyal, honest messenger

on this last Sunday of Baptist Women in Ministry month. What will you do with this good news? Keep it to yourself? Share with your family and friends? How about sharing it with a stranger? Or how about sharing the spiritual and physical gifts given **you**? We served 25 families totaling about 70 people at yesterday's first food giveaway at the New United Gospel Food Mission. More information is to come, but it was a successful first day – a few good things learned, and much fellowship and food was shared. I saw Christ risen and working through each volunteer and family represented yesterday. Tell others how **you** see Christ working in the world today – do **not** give up hope -- the disciples still hoped for a miracle, and they got it! Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John witnessed one. He is risen! Be the hands and feet of Christ today: “⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. God, the Father of Jesus, our Messiah, we thank you for the gospel stories to help illustrate your love for us, your guidance, direction, and these momentous events. If we place ourselves in the stories, we imagine the worst, but hope for the best and look forward to your return! Continue to strengthen our faith as you did Mary Magdalene's and the disciples.' Give us courage to be your voice, heart, hands and feet in this challenging world, as we pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**