

“Seeing Things”

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A reflection for Easter Sunday

Matthew 28.1-20

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The sky only hints at the coming sunrise. So they cannot yet see each other's faces, still marked by tears. They cannot yet see their steps, burdened by hopelessness. Mary and Mary can hear each trudge, each gasping sob. But they cannot see. Not yet.

They cannot yet see the path. It's the brush of garden branches on either side that keeps them moving straight. They cannot yet see the tomb. Nor do they really want to.

They plan to see only at a distance. Ahead, the guard lies in watch. Of them, the Marys have seen too much, days before. From a distance they had watched, then, as the death squad did its Friday's work: bullying and beating, whipping and taunting, stripping and nailing.

Now, as Sunday begins, the Marys know that even if they are allowed right up close to the grave stone, they can only be distanced. Forever distanced from Jesus. From the dead, we are doomed to be distanced, divided by a chilled, misty, screaming silence.

They cannot see. Not yet.

We are here this Easter morning. Let me ask you this: What keeps you at a distance today? What do you need to see, but cannot? Not yet.

II

Look! It is like one of those noises at night that jerks you up in bed. Something happened! But you are bewildered at what it was, still tottering as you are between nightmares and wakefulness.

Imagine being frozen in the middle of a lightening bolt. Imagine the sound. The burning brightness. For Mary and Mary, and the soldiers guarding, it is like that.

The signs are apocalyptic. Earthquake, because nothing remains stable. Angel, because this comes from God. Apocalypse sounds like tragedy, but it depends where you are looking from. Apocalypse stuns the powers, and gives heart to the powerless. Apocalypse happens when God shakes things up, moves them around, reverses the rules. Apocalypse is God's exclamation point. Not at the end of a sentence. Apocalypse launches a fresh paragraph, a whole story that's been waiting long to be told. Apocalypse comes with a

message. (So the messenger-angel.) It's the message that lets us see. Finally see. See that which we could not see before, no matter how desperately we peered. Apocalypse gives sight.

The guards freeze in *rigor mortis*. No matter what the angel says, no matter what God is doing, some will not see.

We are here this Easter morning. Let me ask this: What will God give us to see?

III

"Come," the angel hurries. The Marys hesitate. (Who wouldn't?) "*Come and see!*" "*Come and see. . . .*" Nothing. It's empty.

"I see you are looking for Jesus, the crucified man. He is not here. He is risen."

Without that last detail – "he is risen" – the case of the empty tomb would be a mystery, a puzzle, a crime of grave-robbing for the authorities to solve. But no one is an authority when it comes to resurrection. Resurrection has no legal precedent. With resurrection, God is doing something entirely new.

The tomb is vacant. This absence is important. The angel does not say, "*Don't look there. Hold on to your memories of Jesus. Keep him alive in your hearts. Let his spirit continue on in you.*" These are great things to say, when someone is dead. But resurrected, Jesus is alive. His grave is empty. "*Come and see.*"

Let me ask you this: Will you come closer, and see for yourself? What do you need to see, or not see, to know Jesus is alive?

"Now go!" the messenger continues. "*Go and tell the others, his other disciples!*" Mary and Mary, you will be the apostles to the apostles, the first evangelists. "*Go and tell, that the crucified man has risen from the dead! And tell them to get to Galilee. You will see him there.*"

IV

The Marys rush off! On their way, having just seen an absence – he was not there – they now stumble into his presence. Look! Jesus meets them. "*Hello!*" he says. They grab him. They hold him. Because he is there. As flesh and blood as you and me, right before their eyes. They praise him. They should worship God only! They worship him. He is there, the Lord, right before their eyes.

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus says.

Let me ask this: What fear is holding you? What can Jesus’ resurrection do to your fear?

“Now go!” Jesus says. The Marys still have their mission: news to tell, word to spread. *“And remember, tell the others to go to Galilee.”* Back home, where it all began, where we started our journey together. *“There they will see me.”*

V

Before we go there, a slight detour. Look! The soldiers wake from their terror, and race off to file a report. The cover up begins. Files are shredded, emails deleted, that sort of thing. Get the story straight. Smooth it over with secret payments. You get the idea.

Even resurrection, even an apocalypse, can be missed if you don’t want to see it. Some would so much rather not see. The brightest light cannot pry open clenched eyelids. Even God, God come in flesh and blood, God who could be held, can be missed if you don’t want to look.

Not surprising, really. Remember Friday? The crucifixion? What sort of God is this? God, whom we could beat. God, whom we could mock. God, whom we could crucify. God, who gets thirsty. God, who completes his work, not with a flourish of victory, but a sigh of death. God’s own death.

Foolish, this idea of God! Scandalous. Delusional. Any other story, any fanciful explanation, has got to be better.

If God, this God in Jesus, is real . . . then so much changes. Changes I might not want to see. This whole world changes. I change.

Let me ask you this: Do you want this God we see in Jesus to be real? To change you?

VI

Well, the real story continues. We are skipped ahead to Galilee. It’s where this story of Jesus and us all began. And now, it begins again.

I love the honesty here. *“They worship Jesus . . . though”* it says, *“some doubted.”* This is a lot to take in. I never stop asking questions, struggling, wondering. Those who doubted were nonetheless part of the community Jesus gathered to him.

Jesus says to them, and us, “*Go. Go to others. Go to the whole world.*” He did not rise just for us. There are so many to see. So many who will come to see. The story of Jesus continues. Every time we tell what we’ve seen. Every time we live what we’ve seen. Every time we baptise. Every time someone starts to follow, Jesus’ story continues.

Our mission, our work, everything we see before us, rises out of the resurrection of Jesus.

We are here this Easter morning. Let me finish with this: What will you do when you go from here? Will you keep at a distance, wondering if it is really for you? Will you come closer, to see. To see the unexpected, an empty tomb? To see the unexpected, Jesus alive? Some doubted, yes! Of course! So ask your questions. Find out more.

When you go from here, what will you do? Will you see Jesus in your life, signs of his presence? A caution – this is earth shaking, apocalyptic stuff. Walking with Jesus will never leave you unchanged.

When you go from here, you will go where Jesus has already gone, ahead of you. Wherever you go, he is there already. Look for him.

He is risen. indeed! Praise be to God!