

“I Have Seen the Lord!”

John 20:1-18

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In every translation of the Bible, Mary’s words, “I have seen the Lord!” end with an exclamation mark! Mary doesn’t just speak these words, she proclaims them; she shouts them out loud for all the world to hear: “I have seen the Lord!” She is the first witness to the Resurrection. And her testimony reverberates through the centuries. Her testimony is what Easter is all about! Her testimony injected hope into the hearts of those first disciples and into the hearts of disciples in all times and places. “I have seen the Lord!”

This morning, I am reflecting on the power of testimonials. Though Mary was the first to encounter the presence of the Risen Christ, she was not the last! We have the testimony of the two disciples from Emmaus who met the Risen Christ in the Breaking of the Bread on Easter afternoon. We have the testimony of the Apostle Paul from his encounter with Christ on the Road to Damascus. We have centuries of testimony from women and men, children and youth, who have had Easter morning experiences.

What we know is that the Risen Christ still comes to us in our brokenness and heals us; comes to us in our darkest days and brings light; comes to us in our deepest despair, and establishes hope. There is a Mary in all of us. Whether we are conscious of it or unconscious of it, the Risen Christ is present in all our lives.

When we become conscious of the Risen Christ in our midst, that's the time for shouting "Alleluia!" That's the time for sharing our testimony. That's the time for letting the Mary within us proclaim, "I, too, have seen the Lord."

When Mary encountered the Risen Christ in the garden, she knew she was loved; she knew she had nothing to fear; and she knew she had been handed a mission. This woman was alive, now, in a way she hadn't been before. That's usually the way it is. In the presence of Christ, we are alive in ways we had never imagined.

Over the past 32 years here in South Glastonbury, at South Church, hardly a week goes by without a Christ encounter. Allow me to share a few. Consider this my testimony.

I am recalling how Hans and Lotte Tschinkel would invite me to their home for tea at 4:00 in the afternoon. Their warm welcome, their intimate sharing of stories, their humility, just being in their loving presence made me feel wonderfully alive! I would depart their home wanting to shout, "Alleluia!" The Tschinkels are gone now, but the love endures.

I am recalling the last weekend in January this year. I drove by the church at mid-day. The Christmas creche was still standing. A burn barrel was aglow on the front lawn. Several teenagers were standing at the curb holding signs that read: "Help the Homeless. Donate." And behind the youth was a mountain of winter coats and hats and gloves contributed by our awesome neighbors. Goosebumps covered my whole body. I was alive in a unique way. I rolled down the window of my red truck and I shouted, "Alleluia!"

I recall a day recently when I was just feeling the blues. Yes, pastors sometimes feel the blues. It was a dark and lonely day. A second cup of coffee wasn't helping. I turned on my computer and went to youtube. I asked to hear, "Traumerei," that hauntingly beautiful piano piece by Robert Schumann. As I listened, I came to life. As I listened, I felt the love of my mother who taught me to play this lovely music. As I listened, I knew I was in the presence of a miracle, a Christ presence. I did, in fact, shout, "Alleluia!" The blues faded away and I was alive, risen, ready to face any darkness.

I share these brief testimonials with you today in hopes that each of you will recall times in your life when you were aware of being abundantly alive, abundantly loved, abundantly graced. For it is in these times of spiritual abundance that we know the Risen Christ is real, that we know the Risen Christ is dwelling in our hearts. It's at these times that we know, for sure, we're living in the greatest of hope.

Alleluia! Amen!