

## Have You Seen Jesus? Easter Sunday – April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. (John 20:1-18)

Easter! What a day of great joy!

It's a day when people of faith around the world, cry; Jesus is Alive. Hallelujah!

It's day of smiles, and joy, and a deep sense of hope.

But our story from scripture this morning reminds us that this day was also one that was clouded with a sense of uncertainty, a sense of doubt, and a sense of unwillingness to believe in the mystery of the resurrection.

When Mary came to the tomb and saw that the large stone had been rolled away – she didn't immediately think that Jesus had risen. Even though each of the gospel accounts tell us, that 3 times Jesus had predicted that he would rise from the dead on the third day. 3 times!

But, No! Still when that day came, Mary was not immediately filled with hope and expectation – She doesn't run and say:

*"It's come true - Jesus is alive."*

Instead, her mind went first to the natural conclusion that someone must have stolen Jesus' body out of the tomb. And she runs to the other disciples and says:

*"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"* (John 20:2)

Mary is so convinced in that this natural conclusion must be true, that she breaks down into tears.

And in that moment, Mary's desire for certainty stops her from seeing Jesus.

And when the two disciples first arrive on the scene of the empty tomb – nothing is reported about what they say. You can almost imagine that they just stand there, shrugging in speechless confusion. And even though we are told that one of the two looked into the empty tomb, saw the cloths and believed (v8) - they still don't exactly jump with joy and excitement about the good news, or rush off to tell others – no –we are told that the *"disciples return to their homes!"*(v10).

What? After all this, they simply 'return to their homes?'

Is it possible, that the disciples need for certainty stopped them from seeing and rejoicing.

I think this can be true in our world as well. We are so used to being able to check facts with a quick google search, or check to see what Wikipedia has to say on the matter. We live in such a world of facts, figures, and certainty – that it can be so hard for us to get our heads around

something that we can not understand or scientifically explain. And let's face it – the resurrection is really hard to understand.

But, is it possible that our need for certainty can sometimes prevent us from being open to seeing Jesus around us?

In her newly published book, *Freeing Jesus*, theologian Diane Butler Bass suggests that we live in a world where we cling to certainty. She says that we often avoid others who think differently from us, or who challenge our thinking, and instead we “*Huddle in our own corners ...where we might hold on to at least a shred of our certainty.*”

But she goes on to say that faith is not about certainty. Faith is rooted in hope, and trust and love. We are sometimes conditioned to think that when we have doubts, that means that we are lacking in faith – but Butler Bass suggests that it is quite the opposite.

When we are so sure of something, then we are often unwilling to accept that something else might be true – like Mary in front of the empty tomb.

But when we are open to an element of doubt, and an element of mystery – then we are willing to open ourselves to a new way of seeing things.

Alan Jones, the former dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, would often say, “The opposite of faith isn't doubt. It is certainty.”

Certainty can sometimes destroy faith.

As Mary stood weeping at the tomb, she was so certain that someone had stolen the body of Jesus, that she was not open to the possibility of seeing Jesus.

Even when she saw angels standing in front of her – she still clung with sadness and grief to her logical certainty, that Jesus' body had been taken.

Even when Jesus spoke to her – she was so certain that his body had been moved, that she assumed he must have been the gardener that had moved the body.

Mary's need to be certain blinded her from being able to see and rejoice in the risen Christ right before her.

Does our need to be certain sometimes blind us?

We are living in a strange and difficult time that is filled with uncertainties, but perhaps the upside of that is that has forced us to open ourselves to the mystery of faith.

We can not gather together in person, on this holy day of Easter, but does that mean that we can not see Christ among us.

Perhaps the wider church has become so steeped in tradition, in the sanctuary of church buildings, in the rituals of normalcy, that we have become blinded from seeing Jesus among us - in the gardener, in the child, in the shadow and the light, and in the creation all around us.

But, just as Jesus called out to Mary by name, God is calling out to us – whispering to us, nudging us, revealing God-self to us in creation. We are God’s children, and God knows us by name. In the midst of these uncertain times, the one thing that we can be certain of, even if we can not fully explain it, is that, ‘we are not alone.’

When Mary heard Jesus’ voice, she was immediately open to seeing him. She was able to let go of her certainty, and she was willing to embrace doubt.

The resurrection story can be difficult to explain and to understand. But when we let go of our need to certain, and when we embrace doubt and mystery – then we can grow in a faith rooted in trust and hope.

So, this Easter, during these uncertain times, I encourage you to let go, open your eyes and heart to Christ around you, so that you too can say, “I have seen the Lord.” Amen.