

"Looking with Easter Eyes"
Sermon for Easter Sunday
Lectionary Year C
April 4, 2010
Texts: Luke 24:1-12; Acts 10:34-43
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The earliest ones to the tomb on that first Easter are women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others who are with them. These women have come to the tomb hoping that somehow the stone had been rolled away from its entrance, but not because they expect resurrection to have taken place. No one really anticipated that. No, they come hoping to gain access to Jesus' body so that they can finish anointing it with the spices they had brought with them. They are planning to perform this labor of love for their slain teacher; that's why they are at Jesus' grave so early in the morning.

Probably excited that the stone is no longer in place so that they can enter the tomb, their joy turns into perplexity and perhaps even frustration when there is no body to be found. Suddenly two angels appear to the women and ask a rather startling question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." The angels go on to remind the women of what Jesus himself had taught them in Galilee, that he would be crucified and then be raised from the dead on the third day by the power of God.

The women, the first apostles of Christ, that is to say, the first to go and spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection, run to describe what they have seen and heard to the eleven. Of course the disciples

don't believe it. It must be an idle tale, wishful thinking, a myth, a fairy tale, a story too good to be true. They don't believe until they see the empty tomb with their own eyes. Then they are amazed, and *their eyes are never the same after that*. They are able to look at things with new eyes, transformed eyes, radically altered eyes, Easter eyes.

Easter eyes. They are the eyes of faith, the eyes the disciples would soon have. *They are the eyes that would allow those who had followed Jesus to see everything in a completely different light*. They are the eyes that would allow these apostles to turn the world upside down with the word of life Jesus had shared with them in word and deed.

And these same Easter eyes are available to all of us gathered here this morning. We can have a new perspective, a new field of focus, a new range of vision if we begin to look at things with Easter eyes. And we acquire them by faith, not by some surgical procedure. No contact lenses or bifocals or designer frames can give you the same point of view these Easter eyes can.

Easter eyes. What kind of eyes are they? Before we examine what looking with Easter eyes is like, let's see what looking with Easter eyes is not like. *Easter eyes aren't blind, so they don't deny reality*. Looking with Easter eyes is not like looking through rose colored glasses that filter out all the unpleasant and problematic things of life. Notice how quickly the two angels remind the women that it is the crucified, dead, and buried Jesus who has been raised.

The empty tomb is the one which for the last three days has been occupied by the Son of Man who had been handed over to sinners. The spices the women brought with them were to anoint the body of the

Chosen One of God, chosen to face the rejection of his own people and humiliation at the hands of the religious and political power-brokers of his day. The linen cloths lying in the tomb had been wrapped around the Messiah who had been allowed by God to be tortured and to suffer an agonizing, gruesome death to pay the price for the sin of the world.

Notice also that Peter, in one of his early sermons following the resurrection, preserved for us in our reading from Acts for this morning, preaches that the Lord of all is the same Jesus of Nazareth who was put to death by hanging on a tree, considered the most disgraceful way to die. For the earliest witnesses to the miracle of Easter, the good news of the resurrection does not replace or deny or cover up or excuse the bad news of the crucifixion. The pure, unadulterated evil done to Jesus on the cross is not to be forgotten just because the tomb is empty. Easter Sunday does not do away with Good Friday.

Easter eyes can and do view evil for what it is. Easter eyes recognize that the world and everything in it is fallen, imperfect, out of balance, contrary to the will of God in many respects. Easter eyes accept rather than deny the reality of disease, abuse, poverty, violence, hunger, greed, selfishness, crime, war, dishonesty, manipulation, intolerance, prejudice, hate, injustice, sin, and death in our world. Easter eyes don't just gaze at heaven and the sweet by and by; Easter eyes stay focused on the world and real life as it is experienced each day with all its complex challenges and difficulties. Easter eyes are even open enough to admit that the Church and the people in it are quite capable of evil.

That is what Easter eyes are not like. Looking with Easter eyes

does not involve selective vision, playing "see no evil." The kind of eyes that would see the world in an unrealistic fashion do not do anyone any good in the long run. There is no lasting comfort in a lie. Ours is not to be blind faith; we are not to have tunnel vision. Of what benefit would that really be to us? Not much. Easter eyes are helpful and indeed necessary to us precisely because they include *all* things, good and evil things, in their line of sight.

Easter eyes work like this: because of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, *Easter eyes recognize that there are always redemptive possibilities.* Through the power of God, demonstrated dramatically in the raising of Christ, dead things can be brought back to life. Renewal can take place. Transformation is possible. Change can occur. Things are never hopeless. Even what the world considers worthless trash, God can recycle and use redemptively. God can and does bring life out of death. These are the eyes of faith, eyes that are not closed. Easter eyes can see clearly that nothing is impossible with God, and Easter eyes are open to what God can do if we will trust and obey him.

What would it be like if you began to look at things with Easter eyes? Can you see yourself with the eyes of faith? If you could, you might not be so hard on yourself; you might be able to extend more grace to yourself and be more forgiving of yourself. You might even be able to love yourself as God loves you. Looking at yourself with Easter eyes doesn't mean that you can't see your mistakes, your failures, your shortcomings, and your weaknesses.

But when you train them on yourself, Easter eyes see that you are a special, blessed, and gifted child of God with whom your Creator has

entrusted a unique purpose in this world. Seeing yourself with Easter eyes can help you to accept and treasure who you have been created by God to be and then to become that person. Even if you have been rejected by others, you can still view yourself as a son or daughter of God, precious in God's sight. After all, wasn't the crucified Jesus despised and rejected by the crowd and denied and abandoned by those who loved him?

Can you look at your spouse and your marriage with Easter eyes? Can you see the redemptive possibilities there, or do you just see stagnation, decay, and even death? Easter eyes recognize and take seriously the concerns that need to be addressed and the issues that need to be faced in your marital relationship. Easter eyes don't deny unhealthy patterns of behavior and enable them to continue. But Easter eyes realize that if you will let him, God will work with you to renew and transform your marriage into a beautiful, fulfilling, and lasting covenant of love, respect, fidelity, and commitment.

Can you look at your parents with Easter eyes and in so doing, be able to see past the intentional or unintentional pain they may have caused you? Can receiving the blessing and affirmation of God this Easter help to compensate for the blessing and affirmation your parents weren't able to extend to you for one reason or another? How about your children? What would it be like if you could look at them with Easter eyes? Perhaps through Easter eyes you can love and accept your children as they are, without demanding that they always live up to your dreams, play by your rules, and meet your expectations.

Can you look at other people with Easter eyes, especially people who

are different than you? It is through his own set of Easter eyes that the Apostle Peter was able to see and then to say, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation *anyone* who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Easter eyes recognize that God's grace, love, and care extend to everyone—no matter who, no matter where, no matter what. Easter eyes can broaden our scope of vision and help us to accept as God does, with no prejudice or partiality. How would it affect your relationships with those persons who don't look like you, think like you, feel like you, or live like you, if you could gaze on them with Easter eyes?

Would it help you to be able to look at your job with Easter eyes? Might Easter eyes enable you to see your job not just as a series of tasks to be performed, but as a calling by God, an opportunity to be a witness to the power of the resurrection and the difference God can make in people's lives in and through what you do as your occupation? Easter eyes need to be the ones with which we look at our world. So many people around us seem to have given up hope in our world, have written it off as unsalvageable, even by God. But Easter eyes would have us survey our world and visualize it, as flawed as it is, as God's good creation, which God loves and is still laboring to redeem and for which God asks our help in bringing redemptive possibilities into being.

I urge you to let this day be one in which you allow your vision to be checked and corrected by the good news of Christ's resurrection from the dead by the power of God. I pray that you can start looking with Easter eyes, to let them be the eyes with which you see yourself, your relationships, your job, your world, and all the people and institutions in

it. If you can look at things with Easter eyes, the result, I feel, will be the same as what happened on that first Easter Sunday. Those who came to the tomb were perplexed at first, but went away amazed. That is the way Easter eyes operate. They are perplexed at the world and life in it, but in the end, Easter eyes are amazed at what God can do in and through our world and each of us.