

# "The Lens of Faith"

Easter 2008

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Isaiah 25:6-9

Mark 16:1-8

I love stained Glass,

I think the windows we have in this sanctuary are beautiful and unique.

I don't think I have seen any quite like them anywhere in the world.

When I traveled In Europe as a young man

I spent some time visiting the great Cathedrals

Notre Dame, Westminster Abbey, St. Peters in Rome,

I have a lot of admiration for the people

who spent generations building those places of worship.

I have always wondered why they did it

why they put their hearts and minds and lives

into projects that many would not live to see finished?

Robert Hughes wrote about life in the middle ages this way

*The past is another country,*

*One needs to remember how bare of images medieval life was, -*

*how utterly unlike the image-haze of competing visual messages*

*from billboards to print ads to TV, in which we live today.*

*A man in Chicago sees more images in a day*

*than his 14th century ancestor in York saw in 20 years.*

*In Medieval England the painted or carved image*

*was the blazing exception to nature.*

*The Medieval eye did not see works of art historically as a style.*

*The image was more transparent;*

*the eye plunged straight to the fable or story illustrated.....*

*Symbols and signs were a bridge*

*between things visible and things invisible....*

*links in a chain that stretched from earth to God.*

So when the medieval person walked into a great Cathedral

*The intensity of the colors to that drab world*

*must have been overwhelming.*

He says, "*It was a reading experience  
a spiritual moment... a place to connect with God.*"

*They read the statues outside and the windows inside  
and literally entered into that world.  
And in the case of Stained glass  
they entered into the world of the Bible and the life of Jesus.*

When I come to a church as a pastor  
One of the first things I do is spend some time in prayer in the sanctuary.  
After prayer, I just meditate on the room.

I too want to *read the church,*  
*I want to get a feel for the spirit of the congregation.  
I want to get a sense of the founders and builders of the church  
How they saw their faith*

Let's take a look at our sanctuary.  
Let's read it with the eyes and heart of faith.

When you come in the front doors of the church  
You see the stained glass over the altar  
of the ascended and triumphant Christ in Heaven.  
For this Jesus the Battle is won.  
*The resurrection is over, he is now in heaven triumphant.  
There is a sense here of victory and power in Christ.*

Now if you walk up the aisle  
And look back above the balcony you will see another circular window.  
This time it is a stained glass of an empty cross surrounded by Lilies.  
Once again it is a scene of victory.  
The cross is empty, This is not a crucifix, this is a *resurrection cross.*  
*Which symbolizes new life and the promise of victory over death.*

Other windows in the nave (that is where the congregation sits)  
Include depictions of the Gospel Writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.  
All are very important symbols of a Protestant church  
which emphasize the Bible and its teachings.

All these windows communicate a **confident protestant church**.

They, plus the architecture, tell us that *when those windows were installed*  
***This church was confident and sure of herself***  
***and her place in the world.***

But God told me there was more to know about this congregation of His.

Meditation is not something you do once for a short time,

You stay there, and let God speak to you.

And God told me there was more that I needed to be aware of.

So I got up from the nave and walked up to the communion rail.

Most Christian churches are shaped in the form of a cross.

The center aisle up to the altar forms the vertical part of the cross.

When you get up to the chancel (altar area) the sanctuary  
You get to the **horizontal arms of the cross** (*we call it the transept*)

**On both ends of the transepts are two other stained glass,**

**I think they are the most beautiful windows in the church.**

**One depicts the birth of Jesus**

**And the other is shows the women going to the grave and meeting**

**An angel telling them that He is risen..**

They are so beautiful ... yet hidden away from the majority of the congregation.

**If you want to see the ascended Christ... He is out there for all to see**  
**But the birth and resurrection are hidden...you literally have to hunt for them...**  
**to turn corners,**

I thought they should have been in a **more prominent location** in the sanctuary.

***After all the birth and resurrection,***

***are the core of the Christian Faith***

***they deserve a central location in a church.***

***Why did they put the birth and resurrection in a hidden spot?***

For a while I used to think it had to do with money...

Maybe the windows weren't all installed at the same time.

Perhaps the money was raised window by window.

Perhaps it was put there for **architectural reasons**

**because there was no other place left to put that kind of window**

I have stewed on this off and on for a few years now....

Maybe it has taken 6 years of reflection or maybe I am just a slow learner....

But I think I am beginning to get it

I think know why they hid the birth and resurrection windows off to the side.

***It is there because the Birth and Resurrection events***

***are always hidden and obscure,***

***they are always hard to see and appreciate,***

**Resurrection in the Bible is always understated and anticlimactic.**

It should be there with trumpet fanfares, a large audience and an "*I told you so.*"

But as I read the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Mark,

I read about an Easter that is understated.

In fact, it is even anti-climactic.

The Big day in Mark's Gospel is Good Friday.

He *builds that up for five chapters, beginning with Palm Sunday.*

The Events of Holy week take up one third of the Gospel of Mark.

And he uses only 8 verses in the 16th chapter to describe the resurrection.

**Eight verses to compare with five chapters.**

**Now that is understatement.**

So much so, in fact, that somebody corrected it.

they added a second ending to the Gospel of Mark.

The original ends with the 8th verse of the 16th chapter.

The 9th verse begins the so-called second ending to the Gospel of Mark.

Your Bibles will probably have that second ending.

But it will also have a footnote that says,

***"Ancient manuscripts end the Gospel with verse eight."***

And in the language of biblical scholars,

***"ancient manuscript" means "most accurate and most authentic."***

So Mark ended his Gospel with understatement.

Only 8 verses to describe the resurrection.

This morning I want to look at that original ending.... those 8 verses,

***and ask why?. Why the understatement?***

**And how do we get to the point of seeing the resurrection?**

Well, in our church Sanctuary you have to make a journey.

You can't see it from the pews.

*You have to get up and move to a place where you can see it.*

You move from hearing, to a place where you can see.

And that *place is right here*

*where the vertical and horizontal parts of the cross meet.*

*But even when you get here, all you see is the women and the angel*

*You don't see the risen Christ.*

*You need different lenses, different perspectives to see the risen Christ.*

In our sanctuary we come to this location for a variety of reasons.

*We baptize here, we take communion here, we pray here.*

*We get married here, we join the church here.*

*We commission workers here,*

*we say goodbye to loved one here..*

This intersection of the cross is where

*we connect the Holy and living God with our daily living.*

*This is a place of grace, and commitment and eternal life.*

So, if you want to see the resurrection you are going to have to make a journey.

You are going to have to get out of a comfortable pew

And turn some spiritual and personal corners and put on the lens of faith.

*To get to the intersection of grace and commitment.*

So we start by saying that

*We see the resurrection with the lens of grace and forgiveness.*

*And it is not just for the disciples but for you and others.*

Remember these were people who expected miracles.

They did not have a science ...so I expect

*they would have attributed many things to miracles*

*things that we would explain by other causes.*

Miracles were common to them.

Miracles would not have created that response in itself.

What was unexpected was GRACE. *Undeserved, unearned, unexpected grace.*  
And that is what they didn't expect...  
*that He would be involved. Not after what had happened.*

You have to remember that there was  
a whole series of failures and misunderstandings and betrayals  
on the part of the disciples.

They ran out on him. And he was killed.  
*Why would they expect anything this miraculous to happen to them?*

In the first place the disciples never quite got what he was saying to them...  
*they never really understood.*

They were his disciples, the closest persons to him.  
They lived with him. They should have known him.  
*But they still didn't get it.*

They didn't even know for sure who he was.  
Time after time he would be asking them,  
*"Do you not yet understand?" "Are your hearts hardened?"*  
*"Do you not remember?"*

Near the end he explains  
*he is going to be crucified suffer and die.*  
And you know what the disciples do?

They immediately begin to argue  
*over which one of them is going to be first in his kingdom.*

Here he is ... ready to give his life for all,  
*and they jockey for position at the table of the Kingdom.*

And then the last Supper, He pours out his heart to them  
he *explains the meaning of what is going to happen.*  
*"This is my body given for you."*

And then they go to the Garden,  
*where he asks them to stand watch for and danger while he prays.*  
You know what they do?... They fall asleep.

Then, when he is **taken away**,  
***they run away.***

And at the cross, no one is there,  
except the women, "who watched from afar."

And then the Burial, and Mark makes a big deal of this.  
In those days **John the Baptist was the most popular hero of the time,**  
more popular than Jesus.

And that bothered the disciples of Jesus  
***because people were always comparing John and his disciples  
with Jesus and his disciples.***

The disciples knew this, and they were always saying, "we're number 1".  
In fact they went out of their way to **put John down.**  
***They said that Jesus was greater than John.***  
***So Mark rubs it in.***

When John the Baptist was **arrested**  
his disciples stayed with him.

When he was at the **prison**  
his disciples camped outside..... They stayed with him...  
kept a **vigil** there to be available to him  
in case he needed them.

When Jesus was imprisoned he was **alone.**

When **John was executed** his disciples took his body, as faithful servants should,  
and gave it proper burial.

When **Jesus was executed** his disciples were long gone.  
There was no one to bury him.

So **Joseph of Arimathea**,  
a member of the Sanhedrin, (Kind of a State Senator)  
***Not a disciple, not a follower, not a Christian, not a believer.***

***He was the one who had the courage to go to Pilate  
and ask for the Body of Jesus.***

The words are well chosen....

***Joseph the non-believer took courage.***

***The disciples, the believers, all forsook him and fled.***

Then the resurrection. No one saw it.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary

come on Sunday, in the morning to care for the body.

They see the empty tomb,

go in and see that there is a young man sitting there.

and they were amazed.

The man spoke,

***"Do not be afraid. You seek Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here. He is risen. Go tell his disciples and Peter to go to Galilee, and he will meet them there."***

And then this. This is how the Gospel ends.

***"And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."***

And that is the way it ends. Deliberately understated.

***Astonishment that God accepts us after we reject him.***

***That God keeps his promise to us after we break our trust in Him.***

***That God continues to hope for us after we claim that***

***His ways are too far above us to understand.***

***That God takes our failures, our broken lives and our betrayals  
and hands them back to us as opportunities for new life.***

That's why they were speechless.

***Because we received in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ  
undeserved, unearned and unexpected Grace.***

Paul will later pick that up and build, the first Christian Theology on it.

It was his experience too.

Paul says

***"If the gift of new life were given to us on the basis of merit,  
then I would be the last man on earth to receive it."***

But He did. He received it.

*The resurrection proclaims it is given freely to everyone.*

So Paul says,

*"As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."*

There is no reason for that.

But it is still true.

*God gave his love to us because of who God is,  
not because of what we have done.*

That's why Mark tells the story the way he does.

*He wants to make the point that*

*the resurrection was undeserved, unearned and unexpected.*

Mark in the story gives us a little embellishment  
that enriches what is already there in the passage.

The angel tells Mary Magdalene,

*"Go tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will meet them in Galilee."*

Now why say

*"The disciples and Peter?"*

Why not just say,

*"Go tell the disciples?" After all Peter is one of the Disciples?*

Well obviously

*because Peter, who had tried the hardest, had also failed the worst.*

Peter, who had risked the most had stumbled the most.

And I will bet that

*Peter felt responsible for what had happened.*

*And terribly ashamed of his behavior.*

*So go tell the disciples and Peter.*

Now here is one of the little embellishments. Notice this.

The Greek word for "and" is KAI,

and in Greek "KAI" can mean either "and" or "even".

Which means that you could read this passage in this way:

*"Go tell the disciples, even Peter, who feels that he is world's biggest loser, that Jesus will be waiting for him in Galilee to give him another chance."*

Incredible! Even Peter, who denied him three times.  
They were amazed! Astonished!  
They couldn't say a word to anybody.  
I bet if they tried they would have cried.  
They couldn't speak.

I remember a young woman.

She fell in love in her senior year of college with a wonderful young man.

Her Grandfather, a Methodist Minister performed the wedding.

But the marriage wasn't to last even a year.

Her husband was carrying on outside the marriage.

Like the ex-Governor of New York.

She was devastated, and ashamed, and humiliated.

She couldn't face her grandfather or her family

No one in her family had ever been divorced and she felt like a failure.

But then a mutual friend died and she went to the funeral.

And her grandfather happened to be there at the service too.

After the graveside service, she and her Grandfather were alone in the cemetery.

He walked up to her and hugged her and said,

*I keep wondering what I said wrong in that wedding ceremony.*

And she knew she was still in his love.

And they walked off arm in arm together in God's Grace

*So if you, even you, want to see the resurrection, in your heart.*

*Make the journey toward grace. Put on the lens of God's mercy and Grace*

*Come up here and receive the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.*

*Kneel in prayer, confess your failures, receive the sacraments*

*You don't have to earn it, pay for it, or deserve it.*

*Your sins are not stronger than God's love for you.*

*You will be welcome in the arms of the living God.*

There is also way to see the resurrection with the lens of mission and service.

I want you to notice that the text says

*But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you*

*to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."*

*He is telling them that Jesus will meet them in Galilee*

In those days the full name of that region was not just “Galilee”

It was “*Galilee of the Gentiles*”

It described an area that had a large mix of races, religions, and nationalities.

*Jews, Samaritans, Romans, Greeks Phoenicians, Syrians, Persians,*

Kind of like the Bay area today.

You have to remember here

*that the Jews hated foreigners...*

One of the prayers Jewish men used to say every morning

when they woke up was

*Lord, I thank you that you didn't not make me a Gentile or a Woman.*

The fact that the resurrection was first announced to Women

*and then they were told to meet Jesus in Galilee was not an accident...*

Jesus could have made it a big event appearing in the Temple

rubbing it in the noses of the chief priests.

Appearing to the establishment and community leaders.

I believe that Mark is telling them that

*the Risen Christ is found in mission.*

*That if we want to see the risen Christ*

*we have to go out into the world*

*We have to go to the outcasts,*

*the foreigners the strangers and even to women.*

*We have to be with the people that Jesus loved and cared for.*

Resurrection is not seen passively

It is seen when you enter into the life of service and love to which he calls us.

It may mean, serving the poor at Call primrose, our mission to the poor.

It may mean reaching out and caring for the mentally ill.

It may mean serving breakfast at our humanitarian breakfast.

It may mean doing even more than that.

But the resurrection is seen with the lens of commitment and service.

And here is another way to see the resurrection.

Mark wants to make the point that

*the story doesn't end there in the first century.*

Maybe Mark wrote only 8 verses about the resurrection  
*because he knows that it is only the beginning.... a preface.*

The real story of the Resurrection is still being written  
whenever anyone experiences the gift of new life  
that comes undeserved and unearned and unexpected.  
*Mark knows that resurrection is not something that can be taught.*

You can describe it, you can tell stories about it in people's lives.  
*But the truth of it can only be experienced in your own life.*

And in that sense, the less said the better...

Because you might think that  
*resurrection is something you are to believe in  
rather than something you are invited to participate in.*  
*Resurrection is not an idea. Resurrection is an experience.*  
*And it is available to everybody. Maybe it will look like this:*

Will Campbell wrote a beautiful book  
about his life in Mississippi entitled Brother to a Dragon Fly.  
*In it he tells of the time when his nephew was killed  
riding a bicycle; hit by a car.*

Will and his brother were very close growing up,  
and in adulthood their families were very close.

Will Campbell felt sorrow for the loss of the boy.  
He described his experience this way,  
*"The healing really began six weeks after the accident, at least for me.  
I was lying across the bed in mid afternoon,  
neither asleep or awake, staring at the ceiling, speaking to no one.  
Brenda, my wife, woman and friend,  
came into the room, bellowing as she strode,  
'Get up! Now I mean it, get up!' So I got up."*

That's when the gospel finds its proper ending. That's how you see it.

*When new life comes to you.*

*When you get up and begin to live again.*

*And when you begin to love and reach out to the world.*

That is why the 16th chapter of Mark appears to have no satisfactory ending...

That is why you can't see the resurrection easily.

***because there is only one satisfactory ending to the Resurrection....***

***When he is risen for you.***

That my friends is why the ancients said,

***"He is not yet the Christ 'till he be the Christ for you."***

Until one day, your sorrow, or your self pity, or depression,  
or despondency, or despair, has taken enough from you  
and you have taken enough of it

and somehow you get up and start living a new life.

***That is when it happens.***

And it can happen. It happens to the craziest people

People who don't even deserve it.

It seems that it could happen to anyone.

***So Go tell the disciples, even, Peter,  
to go to Galilee of the gentiles the Foreigners  
and the Lord will meet them there."***

That it could happen at all and continue to happen today is the evidence  
of the only convincing kind,

***That he is risen, He is risen indeed."***