

## Easter Eyes

*John 20:1-18: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

*Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."*

*When she said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."*

*Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him, "Rabbouni!" which means "teacher."*

*Jesus said to her, "Do not hold onto me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father, to my God and YOUR God. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your father, to my God and your God.'" Mary went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.*

My brothers and sisters in Christ: It is Easter Sunday! It is our highest holy day! It is a day when we celebrate that, because Christ lives, we too can live. It is a day when we rejoice that LOVE WINS! It is a day when we rejoice that in Christ we have eternal life. It is a day when we celebrate that the evil of this world and of this life, and that death itself, don't have the final word, but that the love of Christ has the final word! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Have you ever done one of those "Where's Waldo?" books. They were popular for kids when my children were young. They contain pictures that have lots of people or other very dense scenes. Hiding somewhere in the picture is this little man with big black glasses and a red striped shirt. You have to look and look to find him. I learned over time that if I focused on finding a red striped shirt, I could find him. I would tune out the other things and keep focused on finding that red striped shirt. To do well with "Where's Waldo" books, you have to have "Waldo eyes" — eyes that can find that red shirt in a crowd. That could be hard sometimes, because it would be easy to get distracted with the pictures, especially if they were nature scenes. And oftentimes, Waldo would just show up. You've looked at the same part of the page over and over again. You'd be sure he wasn't there and then — POOF — he just showed up!

This morning I'd like us to think about having, not "Waldo eyes," but about having "Easter Eyes." When we are given Easter Eyes we have the grace to see Jesus — to see LOVE show up. And our text from today, John's account of the Resurrection of our Lord, has a lot of "seeing" in it.

When Mary went to the tomb that morning, it was dark outside still, and she probably wasn't seeing much. And she surely didn't expect to see Jesus. He was dead, after all. She was probably having one of those nights where the grief was so strong she couldn't sleep. She may have been playing over in her mind the horrible scenes of her Lord's bloody and cruel death. We are not sure why she went to the tomb. She maybe just needed to be near him. But she surely didn't expect to see him.

But when she got there, she did see something she didn't expect. The stone was rolled away, and before even looking inside she ran to tell Peter and the others. Can you imagine going to the tomb of someone you love and find that it had been messed with? She must have been very frightened and confused and upset, and she ran for help.

Peter and the disciple Jesus loved, who we know is John, literally run to find out what is going on, and when they get there they see something else they don't expect. Jesus's body isn't there. And they run home.

### **He Calls Her by Name; She Sees**

So, we are left with our sister Mary. Crying. Sobbing. Probably now so very confused she can hardly bear it. He is not only dead, but his body is gone. What in the world is going on?

At first, she doesn't recognize him. Seeing is not always believing. Maybe her eyes were glazed over with grief. He even spoke to her and asked her why she was crying. Her heart and mind were so blinded with pain, maybe, that she didn't even recognize his voice. She thought he was the gardener and asked what he had done to the body.

Then something wonderful happened. He called her name, "Mary!" To call someone by name was a sign of great intimacy back then. And in that intimate moment of love and compassion when Jesus says her name, something happened. She was able to see. She recognized him.

And she called him her teacher. You can almost feel the joy and excitement jump off the page. He is alive! She has seen the Lord!

Now there are a few different ways that we “see” things. We can see things as they come to us in our vision. For example, I see that there is a lot of white on the tables for Easter and that many of you are wearing fine new Easter clothes. I see that someone took the time to arrange the tables and put on the lilies and make the church look spiffy. That is one way of seeing things, isn’t it?

There is another way we see, too. An emotional kind of seeing. You social workers, counselors, teachers and parents here use this kind of seeing all the time. If someone is trying to tell us about how they are feeling when their child graduates from college or how they feel when their beloved friend has died, we may say, “Oh, I see.” That doesn’t mean we literally see their daughter or the friend, it means that we can relate to or can understand what that person is feeling. Sometimes when someone is talking to us we can see the feeling behind the words. I know you know what I’m talking about.

And then there is a spiritual kind of seeing. Some people have actually had visions. Our sister, Inge Senger, sometimes could see angels in gardens. She painted them in a picture she gave me. Sometimes we just know something deep, deep down. We can’t see a person’s faith, but we sense that they know something we want. We haven’t seen Jesus’s head or hands, but we have known — we have seen his love in our lives. We know. We look around this place, we know he is here — we see. In this case believing is seeing — not literally, but seeing in a deeper way.

### **The Spiritual Kind of Seeing**

Now, in English we use the word “see” to describe all three of those kinds of “seeing.” The Greek language, the language our New Testament was written in originally, has different words for the different kinds of seeing.

The Greek word that can refer to the deep spiritual kind of seeing is “opaw.” And when Mary says at the end of our text for today that she has seen the Lord, it means more than she just saw his resurrected body. Oh yes! She saw his body and his smile and his physical presence! But she also saw more than that. She saw his love for her. She saw his love for the world. Her spiritual sight was opened and changed in new ways. This use of “opaw” here maybe implies that she began to see the spiritual meaning behind his resurrection, that something was going on here that was much bigger than she could get her heart and head and eyes around.

My brothers and sisters, I’m not sure why all of you have come here this morning. Some of you may be like our sister, Mary. You didn’t get up early and go to a tomb, but your heart is full of grief and loss. Someone you love has died, or someone you love is sick. Your job may be uncertain, or you aren’t sure how to always pay your bills. Or maybe there are places of pain deep in your heart — regrets, choices you wish you could change, habits from which you would like to be free. Or maybe you are burdened by the evil and heaviness of this world: our troubled school district, the culture of poverty, the challenges of aging, the uncertainties of caring about a small church on the margins. Maybe you are bearing the burden of cleaning up the messes of people you have loved who have betrayed you or betrayed the people you love. All these tomblike places may weigh heavily in your soul.

If you have come here with this kind of sadness in your soul today, take heart. You and our sister, Mary, have a lot in common! I pray that, as he did for Mary, Jesus will call your name. And that you can hear him calling your name. He does love you, you know — no matter who you are or what you’ve done or what you’ve left undone. He died because the world couldn’t understand his love. And may you hear him calling your name, deep in your being. Easter is for YOU! Sometimes he shows up in the darkest and most dead places in our lives — as he did that morning. Oh, if you are in a dark place right now, may you hear him calling your name. May you be given Easter Eyes to see him.

You may be here, not because of loss in your life or even with any pain in your life, but because you mom and dad made you come, or because it is always what you do on Easter, or because you love our Lord and just couldn't be anywhere else on this day, or for a host of other reasons. Easter is for YOU! May you also hear him calling your name once again on this Easter Sunday. May you be given Easter Eyes to see him in new ways this Easter.

### **Jesus Carries Love Around**

Now, let me warn you: Receiving Easter Eyes will change your life. And what a grace it is as we begin to see Jesus showing up in the world. Just like red striped shirts are a good indication that Waldo is close by, so when you see love showing up, is a good indication that Jesus is close by.

But, like Waldo, Jesus can sometimes show up in the most unlikely places. And he may lead you to places you never thought you'd go. Sometimes he shows up in places we want to be — places like church and our gardens and by Lake Michigan and places of beauty and glory. But he also shows up at tombs by grieving women who think that all is lost. He shows up eating with tax collectors and sinners and in the company of smelly people. Jesus told us that sometimes he will show up in strangers who come to our door, and Mother Teresa was convinced that she saw him in the eyes of the dying and destitute people of Calcutta. Jesus shows up in many of the forgotten and lost places of the world because he is the Resurrection and the Life. The best places to see him sometimes are places where we think all is lost or where the tombs of this world seem to have the final word.

So, on this Easter Sunday, remember that Easter is for you — for all of us! I invite you to listen once again for him calling your name. He's here. Oh, I pray you can hear him. As your heart warms, and as you hear him, look for him. Receive Easter eyes and go look for him in your homes, in your friends and loved ones, in your enemies, in Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, Stevensville and to the ends of the Earth. And share this good news, that in Christ, death and evil do not have the final word. LOVE DOES!