

**“Seeing Is Believing” - Matthew 28:1-10 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs**

This is not the story we usually read at Easter. That is the version found in the Gospel of John where Mary Magdalene goes and tells the disciples and Peter and John come running to the tomb, then after they leave Mary sees a man whom she thinks is the gardener but discovers that it is Jesus when he calls her by name. Sound familiar? (If not, get out a Bible and read John 20.1-18.) This text from Matthew is the less than familiar story, but it is the alternative text for the church to use today. In other stories women seem to be coming to the tomb to finish the burial preparations that were hastily done on Good Friday to be finished before sundown and the beginning of the Sabbath Day of rest. In this gospel, notice that the women came to “look.” What might we see if we look at the story based on our own faith, our own Creeds that we have been working on through Lent? What we have come to believe? Seeing is believing!

The message for me is to come and see and go and tell. In the early part of World War II, a Navy submarine was stuck on the bottom of the harbor in New York City. It seemed that all was lost. There was no electricity, and the oxygen was quickly running out. In one last attempt to rescue the sailors from the steel coffin, the Navy sent a ship equipped with deep sea divers to the spot directly above the wounded submarine. A Navy diver went over the side of the ship to the dangerous depths in one last rescue attempt. The trapped sailors heard the metal boots of the diver land on the exterior surface, and they moved to where they thought the rescuer would be. In the darkness they tapped in Morse code, "Is there any hope?" The diver on the outside, recognizing the message, signaled by tapping on the exterior of the sub, "Yes, there is hope." Did you read the Lenten devotional from the Society of St. Andrew? It was all about Hope!

This is the picture of our dilemma as we worship this Easter Day. Humankind is trapped in a dreadful situation. All around people seem to be running low on hope, and we look for a word from beyond that will offer it to us. This world in which we live is plagued with war and famine, fear and continual destruction. The more we try to rescue ourselves the more we seem to fall behind. We wonder: Is there any hope?

A new pastor was visiting one of her church members in the hospital. The pastor was a young woman, fresh out of seminary. She was visiting this elderly man who was extremely ill. He wanted to talk to his pastor about his funeral service and the pastor wanted to talk about anything else. Finally, the pastor asked, aren't you frightened?" The old man smiled and said, "Preacher, I know I'm not going to make it, but I'm not afraid. I have a confession to make. I've taken a peek at the back of the book." "What do you mean?" the minister asked. And he said, "You didn't know me 10 years ago when I had my first heart attack. They called it a cardiac arrest. I can remember the medical team thinking I was dead. I can also remember the tremendous feeling of being surrounded by God's love. I was revived by the doctors, but ever since that day I have been unafraid to die. I've been there and it doesn't frighten me. I know that one day soon I am going to go to sleep, and I believe that when I awaken, I will, once again, be surrounded by God's love." This is the message of the first Easter and every Easter since. The tomb is empty. Christ is risen. Jesus is alive. And because of this, we too, shall live!

Why does Easter move around from year to year? Because we do not know what year Jesus died and the only reference for Easter was the Sunday after the Passover that Jesus had shared with the disciples. And Passover moves around depending on the Jewish calendar. In 325 A.D.,

Constantine, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, convened the Council of Nicaea. Among the business before the council, like the establishment of the Nicene Creed, was to establish a uniform date for Easter. Out of the discussion and debate came the “Easter Rule,” setting Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

In the book *Winnie the Pooh* by A. A. Milne, Pooh and Piglet take an evening walk. For a long time they walk in silence. Silence like only best friends can share. Finally, Piglet breaks the silence and asks, "When you wake up in the morning, Pooh, what's the first thing you say to yourself?" "What's for breakfast?" answers Pooh and then asks. "And what do you say, Piglet?" Piglet says, "I say, I wonder what exciting thing is going to happen today?"

You and I can't really plan to meet the Risen Christ because we never really know when or where He's going to show up. But you can be sure of this, He will show up. If you believe...He will show up! And the attitude you need to meet him is the attitude of Piglet, "I wonder what exciting thing is going to happen today?"

Father Basil Pennington, a Roman Catholic monk, tells of an encounter he once had with a teacher of Zen Buddhism at a retreat. As part of the retreat, each person met privately with this Zen master. At his meeting the teacher sat there before him smiling from ear to ear and rocking gleefully back and forth. Finally, the Zen master said: “I like Christianity. But I would not like Christianity without the resurrection. I want to see your resurrection!”

Fr. Pennington noted that, “With his directness, the teacher was saying what everyone else implicitly says to us Christians: You are a Christian. You are risen with Christ. Show me (what this means for you in your life) and I will believe.” That is how people know if the resurrection is true or not. Does it affect how we live?

For the preschool chapels this week I rewrote the words of the refrain from the hymn “He Lives” by Alfred H. Ackley (Hymnal #310) as there were a couple lines in there that may not fit for preschoolers, or even some of the rest of us, like: “*He lives, he lives, salvation to impart...*”

### **He Lives (Refrain)**

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 3/25/24

He lives, he lives,  
Christ Jesus lives today!  
He walks with me and talks with me,  
*and loves me every day.*

He lives, he lives,  
*and gives me a new start!*  
You ask me how I know he lives?  
He lives within my heart!