



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Easter Eyes
Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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Colossians 1:9-14

John 20:1-18

A few years ago in Atlanta, my wife and oldest daughter went through an active exhibit called “Dialog in the Dark”; maybe some of you have gone through the same exhibit.

What happens is that sighted people are physically blindfolded, taken into a completely blacked-out series of rooms and led by a blind person in the dark as if they are blind, through different life situations: a park, a grocery store, crossing a street...

At the conclusion, they discussed their experience: blind, dark, sight, light. It literally changed their perspective about seeing the world around them!

John’s gospel is all about darkness and light, dialogs in the dark for his whole story of Jesus, especially for this day: darkness, light, seeing, believing.

And he begins with Mary Magdalene, walking in the dark, seeing the stone rolled away and running to tell the disciples, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb; we don’t know where he is!”

Then as the shadows of dawn give way to the shimmering light of the sunrise, she sees the angels and then the man who calls her by name.

She sees him, she knows him, and the way she sees her world has changed; as she returns to the disciples and is the first person to proclaim the good news, “I have seen the Lord!”

Easter is divine Lasik surgery! Blind and dark, sight and light:
Easter eyes! I have seen the Lord!

Of course, we try to take care not to fall into the trap of thinking the way we see Jesus is the only way to see him.

Easter eyes don't measure faith by how we see eye-to-eye, but that we both can say, "I have seen the Lord."

As Carlyle Marney put it, "I try to follow the light I've been given, and I hope for more light."

With Easter eyes, we see Jesus as Mary Magdalene did: a walking, talking, living being who calls us by name!

Easter eyes see the divine and humanity become one in Jesus.

Not that I claim to understand how that happens; in fact, such a thing is quite beyond my grasp.

But I accept the Incarnation and Resurrection, and when I combine them with the life and teachings and manner of Jesus, he knows me, and indeed knows the human condition, not in the abstract but as a full participant.

With Easter eyes, we see in Jesus what life is supposed to be like, we see self-giving love that finds full expression of what it means to love God, our neighbors, and self as God intends.

Resurrection matters, and it's more than memories or tradition.

Maybe we make resurrection too complicated; maybe we make what happened that Easter morning too convoluted, difficult, and we need to keep it simple, just like the story itself.

Look again at Mary Magdalene, a woman at the heart of Christianity.

Think about it. As a woman she was not allowed to read the gift of Torah, the words of Hebrew scripture.

But this woman was gifted the eyes to see the risen Lord, the living word, before any of the other disciples.

Easter was not the discovery of life in the midst of the experience of death.

Easter, for Mary Magdalene, was the experience that Jesus's presence makes a difference in how her life was to be lived, how she was loved for whom she was, called by name into a new creation.

Everything had changed!

Easter eyes are a blessing, as Jan Richardson wrote in her prayer:

*May God, who comes to us
in the things of this world,
bless your eyes
and be in your seeing.*

*May Christ, who looks upon you
with deepest love,
bless your eyes
and widen your gaze.*

*May the Spirit, who perceives what is
and what may yet be,
bless your eyes
and sharpen your vision.*

*May the Sacred Three
bless your eyes
and cause you to see.*

Maybe a story will help.

Tim Simpson, pastor of Lake Shore Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Florida, told his congregation on Easter a few years ago that he preaches the same sermon each Easter.

He said that by September, most of them have forgotten his Easter sermon, so he brings it up again every spring.

His sermon, he says, is built around Walter Breuggemann's suggestion that "Easter" is a verb; or as Tim says, "God is in the business of Eastering...but we imagine the world is always going to be (the way it's always been), just like everybody else (believes)."

Then he says, "Except that we've had this encounter with an empty tomb, and that empty tomb has changed, for us, everything. We don't just see the possibilities of the world as it is. We see the possibilities of the world as it might be through the prism of God's Eastering activity in Jesus Christ."

He goes on to say, "Thus, we have a challenge before us this Easter, as we do every Easter. That is, to see the world in this new light, this new activity that God is doing in the world, and believe that it might, in fact be real."

And he ended his sermon saying, "May God help us to live into that promise this day and every day, as we await the coming of the resurrection in all its forms."

Those were the last words of the last sermon Tim Simpson ever preached. He died two days after that Easter as a result of metastatic kidney cancer.

Wouldn't you say he died with Easter eyes, living into that promise "of the resurrection in all its forms?"

I believe that today we Christians must come to grips with the resurrection that not only promises life beyond the grave but calls us to live life in the here and now, life with all its demands and difficulties, because this Jesus who has been seen, in whom we believe, who calls us by name, has changed everything.

I might as well warn you, a return to a pre-Easter way of seeing things will be very tempting tomorrow morning.

The poor will still be poor. The homeless will still be homeless. Heart attacks and cancer and Alzheimer's will still do violence to our lives.

People won't always see eye-to-eye.

But let me tell you, the best part of the story is that Easter eyes are a gift from God.

That in the poor, the homeless, the ill, the despairing and distraught, we see Jesus; and that means everything has changed, we have changed, and we can change things!

As Tim Simpson said, "to see the possibilities of the world as it might be through the prism of God's Eastering activity in Jesus Christ."

Maybe some of you will remember the Andy Griffith show in which Opie, the little boy, killed a momma bird and had to care for the babies.

He puts them in a cage and feeds them and watches them grow, becomes very attached to them.

The last scene in the show is when Andy is making Opie let the birds go. The writer of the show, Harvey Bullock, said that he couldn't figure out exactly how to end the story.

He says as he was sitting at his typewriter, his fingers just started typing; some power, he says, that took over, and this is what was written at the end of that wonderful episode:

Opie says, "The cage looks so empty."

And as the camera pans from Opie's room out the window to a tree,

Andy says, "Yes, but the trees look fuller."

We know how our story ends today, don't we? And we know the power behind it.

The tomb looks so empty.

But we see with Easter eyes, and our lives are so much fuller!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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