Easter Sunday March 27, 2005

# THERE YOU WILL SEE HIM

Matthew 28:1-10

I am going to begin this Easter sermon with several questions for each one of you. There are no right or wrong answers. First question: when you came to the Easter worship service today, what were you expecting or seeking? You knew the music would be inspiring. You were hoping the sermon would be equally so. I'll try not to let you down. But what is it that makes Easter Sunday different? Why is it that people who are not regular church attenders feel the urge to be in worship on Easter?

Second question: after you leave the worship service what do you hope will have happened to

you as a result of being here? Will it make any difference in your life today, tomorrow, next week or next month? I wish I had the opportunity to ask each one of you these questions personally. Since that's not possible, I encourage each one of you to try to answer these questions in your own mind. Here's one way to do it. Next Sunday or two or three Sundays later when you are puttering around the house or doing something other than being in a worship service, ask yourself, "Why did I decide to participate in worship on Easter Sunday and not today?"

All these questions and more were on my mind this past week as I was preparing this Easter sermon. Each year I struggle more with the Easter sermon

than any other. Easter places a heavy responsibility on the preacher because more people attend on this day than any other time during the year except for Christmas. Therefore I want to have something to say that will hopefully make a difference for the good in your life. I also want to have something to say that will be so inspiring to you so that you will want to come back next week and the weeks following.

Here are some of my tentative answers to the questions with which I began this sermon. I believe that you as a human being are so created that you have a need for feeling connected with the Sacred and with one another. Therefore you need spiritual food as much as you need food for your physical

body. Some years ago, Dr. Herbert Benson wrote a book called, **TIMELESS HEALING.** In this book he presents some solid evidence and arguments to support this hypothesis of the need for spiritual nurture and exercise. Dr. Benson is a physician who is on the faculty of the Harvard University Medical School. For more than 30 years he has conducted scientific research in this area. As a result of his research he has come to the conclusion that your human self is "wired" in such a way that you benefit from exercising not only your muscles but your rich inner, human core—your beliefs, thoughts and feelings; your connection to the Sacred and to others. Your overall health and well-being benefits tremendously from "spiritual

exercise" in the same way that you benefit from physical exercise.

Therefore I am convinced there's something about the Easter story which causes you to remember your need for spiritual exercise. It begins to provide some answers to the search within you for something lasting, something eternal, something beyond the everyday routines of life. The Easter story speaks to this deep human longing in several ways.

First of all, the stories of Easter in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are quite modest. Curiously missing is any note of celebration. There is no shouting, singing, dancing, no trumpets or

Hallelujah choruses. Instead there is surprise, fear, and doubt—emotions you can understand. That's because it took the original followers of Jesus time to comprehend what had happened and its implications. Emily Dickinson wrote, "Truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind."

That's why I especially like Matthew's version of the Easter story. In it the truth dazzles gradually. When the women got to the tomb on Sunday morning, they could not understand what had happened. To help them to understand they are given three important messages. First, "Do not be afraid." Second, "He is not here." Third, "Tell the other disciples what have discovered and that all of you are to go to Galilee—there you will see him."

"There you will see him." Why in Galilee? Because that's where most of his ministry had been carried out. It was a familiar place to all of them. It's where they received most of his teachings. It was where they first met him; where they went fishing with him; where they walked and talked with him; where they had meals with him.

When I was studying this story from Matthew's gospel again this week, this striking phrase, "Go to Galilee. There you will see him," I remembered an old song, **"I'LL BE SEEING YOU."** Some of you know it. The song begins, "I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar places, that this heart of mine embraces all day through."

"In all the old familiar places," that's where you can experience once again the presence of family members and friends who are no longer physically with you. So it was that the followers of Jesus were told to go to Galilee—"there you will see him."

However there's a deeper truth in this story of the followers of Jesus being told to go to Galilee. It tells you where the power of the Risen Christ can be discovered today—in the Galilees of today. Where are today's Galilees? They are everywhere.

Perhaps you came to worship today thinking and hoping that you would experience the power of the risen Christ right here in church. The risen Christ is here. Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are

gathered together in my name, there am I also." He's here and he's also in other places. Worship can be an important beginning point.

Maybe for some of you, coming to a worship service is something like the women coming to the tomb early that Sunday morning. There they found a messenger who told them where to find the Risen Christ. They had to go to the tomb to get directions. That's part of the role of the church today and especially worship—to give directions and hopefully to help you discover where the power of God is at work outside your life and inside it. Maybe too that's why no men came to the tomb early that morning. It's a well known fact that men have

difficulty going or stopping anywhere to get directions.

There's an important principle at work here. If you want to discover the Spirit of God in the power of the Risen Christ, it's helpful to come here in the same way as the women came to the tomb, but then you must also go out to the "Galilees in today's world where you will also find the Spirit of the living Jesus at work.

One person described it this way. "I did not see the risen Christ at the tomb and I never touched his side, but I have seen him in many other places and know that he is alive. I saw him last week and Easter had not yet arrived. I saw him on the

subway. There were these children whose hands kept moving as I looked up from my book past the sea of faces. They were deaf, but they were joyously talking to each other with their hands."

Another person said, "I saw the risen Christ in a smile from a kindly gentle woman of 93 years in a hospital room. A pin has been inserted in her hip during an operation. She knew she would walk again. I saw the risen Christ late one night in the tender love shown by a wife and husband as they comforted each other after the death of their baby. "

One of our church members said, "I met the risen Christ in the Matt Talbot Kitchen here in Lincoln, as I was volunteering my time in providing meals to the

hungry. It was then that one of Jesus's parables came alive to me, the one in which he said, 'for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.....As you did it to one of the least of these my sisters and brothers, you did it unto me."

Another one of our church members said, "I met the risen Christ in the many people I worked with as we volunteered our time in building a Habitat for Humanity house here in Lincoln."

Too many people tend to think of Easter in the past tense. They picture it as something that occurred several thousand years ago and therefore as something to be commemorated each year. It is that, but Easter is also in the present tense. Easter is a verb in addition to being a noun.

In the broadest terms it's helpful to think of Easter as a verb which describes the continuing alive, loving energy of God flowing through all things, all time, all space. Easter is not only about an empty tomb, it is above all a message about the victory of self-less love over loveless power. It's an event which reminds you that the loving energy of God endures all pain and suffering, even death, without being overwhelmed or conquered by it.

Of course, you can look at the world today around you and say, "But death, sin, evil, and suffering still thrive, therefore where is power of the risen Christ at work?" The story of Easter does not promise that there will be no more suffering, pain, struggle or death. What it does is assure you that God's creative loving power will always overcome sin, evil, suffering and death.

As human beings with free will, you can decide to go to the "Galilee's" of this present world and there you will see him or you can decide not to go. In other words you can decide to let Easter work in you and through or you can ignore it. But you cannot keep it from working in the world at large.

So I'm glad you are here this morning. I'm delighted that you have come to one modern kind of Galilee. I hope you have at least experienced a little bit of the loving energy of the risen Christ in this place. I also hope you will continue to meet the risen Christ in the many other Galilee's of today's world.

I began this sermon with several questions. I want to end it with one more. It's the big Easter question. How will you continue to live in this world? Will you live from your fear, as though who you are can be taken away from you along with what you have? Will you continue to live as if the temporary thrill of acquiring more and more stuff is the closest you will ever come to human fulfillment? Or will you live as

though your worth and value are a given, as though nothing in creation can ever separate you from the love of God? If you live this way, you are living the deepest truth of the Easter story. Amen.