

ST. FRANCIS EPISCOPAL CHURCH
VICTORIA TEXAS

Easter, 2009

John 20:1-18

The Reverend Faith Bledsoe

It was like he was calling me out of a bad dream, the worst nightmare of my life actually. It seemed I had lived two days wandering in black darkness. It began with the arrest, then the crucifixion and the burial, and just that morning I had discovered the tomb was empty. Someone had desecrated the grave and taken my Lord. My heart was broken with grief beyond any experience of my life.

Then, into the darkness of my grief came the voice of the Teacher. "Mary!" he said and in turning it was if I had awakened suddenly from the nightmare and there he was. My tears of grief mixed with laughter, joy and gratitude at the sight of him. There he was, the one I had seen die on the cross, wrapped in a burial shroud and laid in the tomb. He was standing an arm's length away from me! On one hand, I couldn't believe it and on the other, I knew it was him. I knew it in the same way that you know your own heart is beating within your chest right this very minute. He had died and there he was alive standing before me. The Temple had indeed been destroyed and raised again in three days!

"Go tell them," he said. "Go tell them you have seen me; that I have been to our God and am returning to there. Go and tell all the world that though I have died, I live; that One who was once in the grave now lives in the heavens; that the life of resurrection begins now, for anyone who desires it. Go and tell all the world that you have seen me."

I ran to where Peter, Mary, James and the others were and said to them, "I have seen the Lord!" and we rejoiced in the resurrection of the one we knew as wisdom teacher, healer and Lord. Jesus appeared several times over the next few days and weeks, teaching, praying with us;

even showing those present the piercings in his hands, feet and side. And then the day came when his union with God was so complete that he no longer walked this earth in his body. What he had taught us was that we were now his body on earth. "Go and tell all the world."

And we did, all of us leaving Jerusalem to spread the news of resurrection and new life; of forgiveness of sin and healing of wounds. I traveled all over Italy, finally landing in Rome where I gained an audience with the Emperor Tiberias. I told him my story; of my initial encounter with Jesus, of being healed by him and loved into new life by the community that surrounded him, of Jesus' teaching to love one another as God loves us, of the new life found in the forgiveness of sin, of Jesus' death and resurrection and of Jesus coming to me in the garden.

I said to him on that day what I had said to the others, "I have seen the Lord!" and I began to talk of new life. As an illustration I picked up an egg from the buffet nearby and held it up for the court to see. Tiberius responded that no one could rise from the dead, anymore than that egg could turn red. Well what do you think happened then? That egg turned red! Trust me when I say Tiberius was speechless and he and all his court were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ in the coming days.

Now I understand that it is tradition in parts of the church to exchange red eggs on Easter Sunday with the greeting "He is risen!" and the response, "The Lord is risen indeed." I am here to tell you today, I have seen the Lord. He is alive. He is living among you and within you. You are his hands, his feet, his eyes, his ears, his voice.

My prayer for you is that you know and live the resurrected life now, today; that you see the face of Christ in your neighbor, you hear the cry of the poor, your hands reach out with compassion, your feet walk the way of justice and peace, and that your cry to all the world, in word and action, will be now and forever, "I have seen the Lord! Alleluia, He is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!"

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