

## **He saw and believed**

John 20:1-8

April 24, 2011

What did he see? The disciple who reached the tomb first, but went in last? Once he did step into the tomb, what did he see?

Nothing! He saw nothing! He should have seen a body, Jesus' body, but he saw nothing, because it wasn't there. He saw what wasn't there ... and believed.

He believed that Jesus' body was not there because Jesus was not dead. Jesus had been dead, but Jesus was not dead. He did not see Jesus for himself, not yet, but at that moment, not seeing, he believed.

How happy are those who believe without seeing! "How happy are those who believe without seeing me," Jesus would later say to another of his disciples who was unready and unwilling to believe until he could see Jesus and touch Jesus for himself.

What did he see? The disciple who reached the tomb first, but went in last? He saw Jesus! Yes, he saw Jesus! He stepped into the tomb and saw nothing, nothing but the linens cloths that had been used to wrap Jesus' dead body, but, with the eyes of faith, he saw Jesus ... alive!

The tomb was empty and dark, filled with no signs of life, only the brooding shadow of death, just as this sanctuary is this morning. But in the midst of the darkness, he saw light! With the shadow of death all around him, he saw life! In an empty tomb, he saw Jesus!

What do you see? What do you see when you look around, here in our sanctuary, and out there in our world?

I see tornadoes and floods and earthquakes and tsunamis. I see people desperately poor and people desperately hungry. I see people trampled and tossed aside by neighbors and by governments as if their lives meant nothing. I see people caught in the deadly crossfire of wars in which they have no real stake, except to survive, and out of which they will likely reap nothing but more suffering.

I see broken marriages and wasted lives. I see aging bodies and weary spirits. I see people living under the oppressive shadow of unemployment and loneliness and hopelessness.

I see unfairness. I see injustice. I see inequity. I see wealthy people getting wealthier even as poor people get poorer, and national leaders bickering over the best ways to get the economy moving again. I see people careless about the longterm well-being of this earth, preoccupied instead with short-term profit. I see people still judged by the color of their skin or the sound of their name.

I see people unapologetically selfish and people senselessly cruel. I see bitter people and divisive people and cynical people and people who simply don't care about much of anything. I see people trapped by their own histories and bad choices, and people suffering the consequences of other people's history and bad choices. I see people blinded by greed and by self-indulgence and by thinly disguised hatred.

I see a world still unbent to God's will, ruled not by love, but by self-interest and pride and envy and fear.

But in the midst of the chaos and the sadness and the hopelessness and the fear and the darkness, I see Jesus. I see Jesus ... alive!

I see Jesus still telling those eager to find God, longing for a real taste of the presence of God, "You cannot see God's kingdom without being born again." You must be born ... again! You will be born again! God's Spirit himself will birth you once again and make of you a new creature, make you God's own dear child!

I see Jesus still reaching out to people considered undesirable and unreliable and unimportant by the rest of "respectable" society, telling them as much by his manner as by his words that they do matter, that God sees them and knows them and offers to them the best of what God has to offer any human being.

I see Jesus still stopping to pay attention to the suffering people everyone else ignores, not seeing pain as punishment, but seeing possibility, the possibility of healing, the possibility of mending a broken body, the possibility of restoring a broken heart.

I see Jesus still reminding with words and with signs that it is never too late. It is never too late for God! There is no bridge too far, no heart too hardened, no missed last chance, no last straw, no final obstacle too great to overcome. Even death itself ... is defeated!

I see Jesus still full of grace and truth, still full of the very essence of the being of God, still embodying the tender and tenacious love of God, still emptying himself, still humbling himself, still giving himself away, still enduring suffering

and pain for the sake of a blind and clueless humanity, still clearing the path to new life, the path to eternal life, with his own body, still inviting, still welcoming, still loving, not just a chosen few, but all.

I see Jesus. With the eyes of faith, I see Jesus, alive! Do you see him?