

*“Although We Have Not Seen Him...”*

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur

, Georgia

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, April 27, 2014

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**Holy Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:3-9    John 20:19-31**

1 Peter 1:3-9 -- A Living Hope

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

<sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

<sup>8</sup>Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup>for you are

receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

### John 20:19-31 -- Jesus Appears to the Disciples

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his

disciples, which are not written in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## Sermon

### **Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

One night a famous theologian and philosopher

was speaking at a convention center filled with Christians.

He spoke for more than two hours

challenging the resurrection of Jesus,

pointing out that there is no proof or evidence of a bodily resurrection.

After he finished his speech an old preacher slowly got up

and walked over to a microphone set up for questions from the audience.

He took an apple out of a paper bag and started to eat it.

*“Now, Professor,” he said, “I haven’t read all the books you have.”*

Crunch, munch.

*“I haven’t travelled or talked or testified at the places you’ve been.”*

Crunch, munch.

*“But tell me this, Doctor. This here apple I’m eating, is it bitter or sweet?”*

The professor said,

*“I can’t answer*

*the question because I haven’t tasted your apple.”*

The old preacher took the last bite of apple, crunch, munch,

dropped the core into his paper bag,

looked up, and said, *“Neither have you tasted my Jesus.”*

And the crowd went wild.

Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

Peter wrote to the church in Asia Minor,

*“Blessed be the God and [Creator] of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

*By God’s great mercy God has given us a new birth into a living hope*

*through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*

*Although you have not seen God, you love God.*

*Even though you do not see God now, you believe in God,*

*and you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.*

*You rejoice because you are receiving the outcome of your faith;*

*you rejoice because you’re receiving the salvation of your soul.”*

**Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

Last Sunday morning we celebrated Easter, the Resurrection of the Lord.

We hosted a spectacular Easter egg hunt,

arts and crafts for children, a telling of the meaning for the day,

all followed by a butterfly release by the cross on the church lawn.

Reports from the front lines are that no less than 36 children participated. Praise God!

One blessed child is Haley, the granddaughter of Steve Teague.

Steve told me afterward that Haley has a brain tumor

which makes her waddle when she walks.

She gathered with the very young children on the grass by the parking lot.

The plastic eggs were spread on a small patch of grass

so they would be easy to collect and keep young ones from straying away.

Someone said, "Ready, set, go!"

and the boys and girls started to pick up the brightly colored eggs.

Haley moved forward, clutching her Easter basket,

her sights set on a large orange egg about ten feet away.  
She walked right past many eggs on her way,  
waddling forward with great determination.  
When Haley reached the large orange egg,  
she stooped down, picked it up,  
and then very carefully placed it in the basket of  
another child.

Surely her act of generosity on the highest of holy days  
pointed another soul to Christ.

Those watching may not have seen Jesus Christ rise up from  
the dead,

yet their eyes were opened on the church lawn to the  
divine reality

that Christ arose and lives in Haley and in each  
one of us.

**Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

After 29 years of pastoral ministry,

after having my corners honed by the whole people of

God,

I have deduced that I have neither the power nor  
ability,

nor the personal or professional  
responsibility

to convince another soul of the  
presence of God.

All I can do and share and be is to set my compass on the Polar  
Star of Jesus Christ,

and pray with all my heart that someone else might  
choose to do the same.

William Willimon says,

*“I do not think our job is to argue disbelieving people into  
belief in resurrection.*

*I think we have got to live lives of discipleship*

*that make no sense if Jesus had not been raised from the  
dead.”*

*“There is no absolute, irrefutable, unassailable “proof” of  
resurrection.*

*Even after the resurrection some of Jesus’ own disciples  
doubt.”*



*“Jesus does not trouble them or himself about their doubts. [Should we?]*

*Rather Jesus turns to them and commands them:*

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

Then Jesus sends out his disciples to the far corners of the earth,

not with arguments about the truth,

not with proofs and evidence of a bodily resurrection,

but rather as those whose presence, whose actions,

whose love, whose speech, whose kindness and care,

whose being and sharing of the Good News

is the only “proof” of the resurrection.”[\[1\]](#)

**Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

Jesus is not troubled nor does he trouble anyone else or himself

with other's doubts.

If it were not for doubt, we would not have faith.

Doubt and faith walk hand in hand;

the opposite of faith is not doubt; it is fear.

When it comes to arguing anyone else into faith and believing,

I do not have the power to make or shake or break anyone else into believing.

What is in my power – and in yours -- is my availability to be a living witness,

a living testament, a living hope,

a living word that points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ

into life after life, into life everlasting.

**Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

Correct me if I am wrong, but you will not be convinced to change your mind

or your heart or your entire world view

by someone you don't know or do not trust.

And if you have been hurt or abused or misused in your past,

it is that much harder to build trust,

and it takes much longer than if you had not  
been hurt.

Rather than making arguments or seeking to convert or  
convince,

we should build trust.

What does our spiritual practice have to say about this matter?

How do you build trust?

Love. Love somebody, and let them love you.

Listen. Listen to someone, and let another soul speak to  
your heart.

Laugh. Share laughter, and stay in touch with the  
lighter side of life.

Commune. Break bread together.

Share a cup of coffee and piece of pie and listen,  
love and laugh,

and suddenly, spiritually, simply your  
encounter becomes holy.

We are not going to be changed nor change another soul

through arguments or disputing truth,

nor by force or violence, by raising the volume  
or imposition of will.

Honestly, I do not know how to convince you

to have a relationship with God and God's people.

All I can bear witness to is what I know in my heart of hearts.

All I can do is extend an invitation based on the reality of my  
faith experience.

This is the only life I have to share and present and offer to the  
world.

Imperfect, flawed, filled with joy,

seeking daily to practice the Christian faith and  
disciplines,

grateful for opportunities to serve and love with  
integrity and sincerity and joy.

So, my friends, when someone asks for proof of the  
resurrection, here it is.

Before you stands one who has been born again, from  
above, a living hope.

**Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

You may wonder:

Does God forgive?

Does Jesus love me like the Bible says He does?

Does the Holy Spirit pray for you and yours?

Plead your case to God?

Empower you? Strengthen you? Comfort you  
with tender mercies?

My answer is going to be affirmative: Absolutely!

What is your answer?

I believe because I have seen Jesus my Lord.

What do you believe?

Christ's love has been revealed to me through the living hopes  
who blessed me.

What is being revealed to you?

They say that Christianity has no grandchildren.

Each generation must learn the faith for itself;

each person must have his or her own faith encounter.

Here is to those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

### **Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

“A woman was asked to serve her church by working with the youth of her congregation.

She thought the idea so completely absurd.

She had no experience in working with young people.

She suspected that she had few talents for this sort of ministry.

[However] she prayed about it

and decided to overcome her doubts and her fears

and do the best she could to work with the youth.

That was ten years ago.

The youth ministry that she created

is famous all over her town

as being a model of how youth ministry ought to be done.

*“Funny,” she said to a friend, “those kids have strengthened my faith.*

*They have revealed Jesus to me in ways that I never could have imagined.*

*I have more faith now than I did at the beginning.*

*I simply went, did as I was told,*

*and on my way, discovered the Jesus I never knew.”[2]*

Go.

Follow Christ.

Discover the Jesus you never knew.

Allow others to see the Living Hope come alive in you.

**Have you seen Jesus my Lord?**

Who in your midst needs to be made aware of the presence of a hope that is alive,

grounded in trust without any strings attached?

The living hope of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is you.

In you, family and friends and neighbors discover

that God has flesh and blood, scars and smiles.

Through you, people discern that Jesus Christ has an aroma, a  
scent, a fragrance,

and a warm, welcoming hand extended in love.

Thanks to you, the world looks on in amazement

while you unexpectedly, carefully place eggs and  
seeds of grace

into someone else's basket.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen!*

Extra Material:



Annie Dillard, in her book Teaching a Stone to Talk

says that Christians conduct ourselves

as if we did not really understand the  
implications

of following a living, present, active  
God.

She writes that, "*On the whole,*

*I do not find Christians sufficiently sensible of  
conditions.*

*Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we  
so blithely invoke?*

*Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?*

*The churches are children playing on the floor with their  
chemistry sets,*

*mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.*

*It is madness to wear ladies straw hats and velvet hats to  
church;*

*we should all be wearing crash helmets.*

*Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares;*

*they should lash us to our pews.*

*For the sleeping god may wake one day and take*

*offense.”*<sup>[3]</sup>

[1] William H. Willimon, Pulpit Resource, Vol. 39. No. 2. P. 24. Portions adapted for this sermon.

[2] Willimon, *Ibid.*

[3] Annie Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters, NY. HarperPerennial. 1982. P. 58.