

A few years ago in Atlanta, my wife and daughter went through an active exhibit called "Dialog in the Dark" - maybe some of you went through the same exhibit.

What happens is that sighted people are physically blindfolded and led in the dark as if they are blind by a blind person, through different life situations: a park, a grocery store...

At the conclusion, they discuss the 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 gospel, especially for this day - darkness, light, seeing, believing – he says it of himself in our lesson – the beloved disciple running through the shadows of dawn, looked in the tomb and his whole perspective of his world changed - he saw and believed.

Like 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!”

And 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.

The way she saw her world, her life had changed; as she returns to the disciples and proclaims the good news, “I have seen the Lord!”

Easter is divine Lasik surgery! Blind – dark – sight – 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 me by name!

Easter eyes see God 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, I find I stand in the presence of someone far greater than myself or anybody else.

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, both now and in the new creation. He is the one who knows what it means to love God, others and self as God intends.

We see self-giving love that finds full expression in Jesus' life and death and through his resurrection.

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 - Easter is not the discovery of life in the midst of the experience of death.

Easter is the experience that God's presence makes a difference in how we live our lives and deal with our losses.

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Look again at our own dialogs in the dark that are transformed when believing is seeing – where even today believers are given eyes to see more clearly – a glimpse of Christ and his transforming, life-giving power in our lives.

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, FL told his congregation on Easter a couple of years ago that he preaches the same sermon each Easter.

He said that by September, most of them have forgotten that 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 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, believing it is in fact real!

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, 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.

Children will keep on breaking their parents' hearts; parents will keep on disappointing their children. 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.

According to the story, for everyone who would receive the gift of Christ's presence, their eyes were open and they saw Jesus for who he is.

"I have seen the Lord."

And it changes everything!

Do you remember the Andy Griffith show in which Opie 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 it.

But 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 the story ends today, and we know the power behind it, don't we?

The tomb looks so empty.

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

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.