

April 17, 2022 What Was Seen and Heard John 20:1-18 Acts 4:5-22

Easter, in the Church of Jesus Christ, regardless of the denomination, is about one thing. Jesus was crucified, pronounced dead with good reason, the body was placed in the tomb under guard to see to it that no one disturbed the tomb or took the body. But on the first day of the week, Sunday, early in the morning, the tomb was open, the burial linens were there, and neatly folded. And it was revealed to the women, Mary Magdalene being among the first, that Jesus was risen from the dead.

I usually read just one passage, the one you heard read first this morning, or its equivalent from the other gospels. Notice this because it is important. The “official disciples of Jesus” were men. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all tell us the men, did not believe the report of the women. In Jesus time, a woman’s testimony was not admissible as evidence in any court. Matthew and John as recognizable disciples, Mark and Luke as unofficial disciples all tell us...we blew it! We just did not believe it was possible because Jesus was so obviously dead!! We thought the women were just being...women!

There are two lessons to be learned from this reality. First of all the church has grown, in its understanding of the gifts, the talents, the contributions, and witness of women, to some extent. We look back through the lens of the women of the church today, and we see that...guess what?...there has

never been a time when their witness was less than faithful. They worked hard to support the cause, as they do today. And they paid a price for it in the very real and violent world.

In John chapter 20, the great disciple and apostle, John tells us, he looked inside the tomb. And he believed. Believed what you may well ask? He believed the body was gone. He believed the linen was all there. Neatly folded. The cloth that would have covered Jesus head separate from the linens that wrapped the body and held the myrrh and aloes in place. John specifically tells us... “He and Peter still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” (John 20:9) Jesus told them numerous times that this must happen. It went in one ear and out the other.

Do you realize what a dramatic confession this is? The Bible says John wrote in his own chosen words. I didn't believe it. Peter didn't believe it. The first to hear and see and believe, are the women named in the Gospels. Mary Magdalene is one of them. Mary the mother of Jesus was one of them. Salome was one of them. The other Mary was among that number. Not Peter, not John. Not until they were face to face with Jesus, risen from the dead. Each Gospel writer makes a form of that same confession. Thomas gets a lot of heat from us for not believing. There is little difference between Thomas and the others who make up the Twelve.

But that is also one of the reasons I took the time and made the time to read the passage from Acts 4. Things

happened between John 20 and Acts 4. Time passed. At evening on that first day of the week the disciples, a crowd of the followers of Jesus gathered together in the Upper Room. They are confused. They do not really know what to make of the words of the women, except as Dr. Metherell said to Lee Strobel, seen and heard, physically present among the living? "Dead men do not normally do that!" John tells us they gathered in that Upper Room. I have been there. That building still stands in Jerusalem. It is continually visited by Pilgrims to Israel. John says they were afraid for their lives. They made sure the doors were locked so that no one could break in and arrest them easily.

Jesus came and stood among them. HE said, "Peace be with you." And then HE showed them HIS wounds. HIS hands, HIS side where the spear pierced him, tore his lungs and burst HIS heart. And they were overjoyed! HOLY...God! That is the bridge between John 20 and Acts 4. They see HIM in the Upper Room. Thomas is not there. The next Sunday they gather again and Thomas says, I don't buy it. I would need to touch the wounds before I would believe it. And Jesus came and stood among them (John 20:27) Jesus offers HIS wrist..."Put your finger here." "Put your hand into the wound in my side, here." And Thomas gasps and says, "My Lord, my God."

In fact John 21 begins with yet another occasion when Jesus meets the disciples on the shores of the Sea of Tiberius. The note at the bottom of the page tells us that is the Sea of Galilee. The Romans are giving new names to the old

places. Christians and Jews use the old names. They are part of our faith heritage. That is where Jesus called Peter and John to “follow HIM.” Three years before. Jesus repeats the experience. They are starting over. This time it is not Sunday School....it is a post resurrection experience, so that they will do Acts 4.

And what I want you to remember, is that for John and Peter, James and Matthew and the rest of the Twelve. It was not one experience of the resurrected Jesus being with them and involved again in their lives. It is like what Paul told the Corinthians when he repeated that creed, he had been taught when he came to faith...Jesus appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve, after that HE appeared to more than 500 at one time. Some have passed but most of them are still alive...you really should talk to them, ask them what they saw, what they heard, it will change your life! It was part of how Saul of Tarsus became Paul the apostle. Then Jesus appeared to James, his younger brother... who like Thomas did not believe...until he did. Then Jesus appeared to all the apostles again. And last of all of course, HE appeared to Paul, and Paul knew at once who it was that spoke to him out of a burst of blinding light. And Paul told the Corinthian believers... “whether it was I, or they, this is what we preach. And this is what you believed.”

It was never one appearance. And the silence of the opposition that plotted and planned and made the crucifixion happen is deafening. Acts 4 is not a matter of years later, it is a matter of a few weeks. A crippled man, who is widely known for his being crippled, is suddenly and

miraculously healed. He had been begging. He asked for money. Peter said, "Gold and silver have I none, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." And the man did. The result is that Peter and John are both arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem. This is what they were afraid of when they hid behind locked doors in the Upper Room. But John and Peter are no longer the men they were. They have seen Jesus risen from the dead with their own eyes. Not once, not twice, a number of times and with 498 other believers on one occasion. They are not dreaming, and they are not caught up in how things were. So they take the Council to task. The crippled man is with them, walking, running, doing his thing with new legs and feet. Peter and John are told to cease and desist. And they have an answer. "Judge for yourselves. Is it right to obey you rather than God? We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

I have shared this with you before. I will do it as briefly as I can. Peter died in Rome. Crucified, head downward, at his request. He kept telling what he had seen and heard.

James stayed in Jerusalem preaching about Jesus. Herod had him beheaded.

John cared for Mary Jesus mother. He did time in a prison camp on the Isle of Patmos. Died a natural death. Think about that.

Andrew preached in Scythia, Greece and Asia Minor. He was crucified on what we call St. Andrew's cross.

Philip preached in Phrygia and was martyred at Hierapolis.

Bartholomew was a missionary in Armenia, and was whipped till he died.

Thomas was a missionary in Parthia, Persia and India. Was martyred near Madras on Mt. St. Thomas.

Matthew was martyred in Ethiopia.

James the less, preached in Palestine and Egypt. He was martyred in Egypt.

Jude preached in Assyria and Persia and was martyred in Persia.

Simon Zelotes, was crucified.

Matthias was elected to replace Judas. He preached in Ethiopia and martyred there.

Paul made a number of missionary journeys. He preached in Rome. Chained to a Roman soldier he preached to Caesar's household. He was beheaded in 67 AD. He wrote several letters to churches he had founded while confined in Rome.

How did they become so brave? So steadfast? So faithful? Each one experienced seeing Jesus risen from the dead. And yet Jesus said this about you, about me. "Jesus said to Thomas, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen me, and have believed." (John 20:29) To God be the glory.

Let us pray;

Lord we give thanks for what you have shown us this day and every time we gather together in worship, reading your word, fed by your Spirit. Bless us that we might be a blessing to others. Receive the glory and the praise for what we attempt in faith, and what we do in YOUR name. Amen