

Easter Sermon
John 20:1-18
April 16, 2017

“What You See...Is What you Look For”

How many of you have ever taken an “inkblot test?” If you don’t know what I mean, basically you stare at unusual shapes formed with ink on paper, and are asked to describe what you see. Everyone seems to see something different - many get a headache trying to figure out what’s there. Psychologists use it to examine a person's personality characteristics and emotional functioning. The test is named after its creator, Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach. Those Swiss are pretty smart, but they can a little weird too. Two people can look at exactly the same wild “inkblot” image and see wildly different things.

Like, for example, the different things Mary Magdalene saw as opposed to what Peter and John saw on the very first Easter. Everybody in this story *looked at* the same thing, an empty tomb – or at least a “*body-less*” tomb, but they didn’t “*see*” the same things in there at all. It's Mary Magdalene who has the first look as she trudges out to the tomb well before the sun could adequately light her way. But even in the dim first-light, Mary can see well enough to see trouble - the stone has been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. In those days that meant one thing – grave robbers. The open tomb was a sure sign that someone emptied it of Jesus' body.

That makes a certain amount of sense. His body had been wrapped in fine linen clothes that were filled with exotic, expensive spices, a valuable commodity for thieves. Garments worn under the robes of Jewish priests that were no longer used were considered too holy to burn or discard, so they were cut into linen strips and made their way into the “*second hand stores*” of that era as baby clothes and burial clothes. Second hand or not, they were still considered holy, and were still valuable. Mary sees only a tomb that had been tampered with, and runs off, disconsolate.

So she returns with two others, Peter and John, who arrive with enough daylight to actually see into the tomb. Oddly Peter and John don’t notice what’s *not* there, but what still is. The linen wrappings are not gone but scattered about, the head cloth folded up nicely in one place, the linen body wrappings piled up in another. So here we are in the midst of the greatest story in the Bible, the most consequential event in human history I might add - the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and what do the two guys “*see?*” I believe in the resurrection – but I gotta tell you I have a hard time believing that two men – first thing in the morning no less - actually notice dirty laundry on the floor, (when was the last time any man *you* know noticed that!).

All right, so their eyes are ok even at dawn. But whatever John, “the other disciple” then “*saw*”, and read that word please as meaning “*believed*”, he sure knew that this was not the “*modus operendi*” of grave robbers – at least not any of the ones he knew. No, John *sees* something in this laundry left in the tomb. This was not the work of sloppy thieves – because these were not signs of a hasty exit but a very orderly one. These laundry piles were signs of order not chaos, the person who did this didn’t need them and was in no hurry when he left. This was a God thing, not a petty thief thing.

Then it's Mary Magdalene's turn one more time. And what do you know she *sees* something else - again. For Mary there are no piles of white laundry - instead, there are angels clothed in white. But no comfort in those angels for Mary, just more fear. It's funny how a look at the resurrection can reveal such different things to people. There is an old saying though that "*we see what we look for, and hear what we listen for.*" So what about you? What do you hear when you hear the words "*he is risen - he is not here?*" What do you *see* when you look at Jesus Christ?

How many times have you read, or misread the gospel, assuming it to be a story of comfy personal salvation without a costly public witness to your Savior? Or how many times have you heard the Bible's main message is little more than a tidy laundry list of "*bad behaviors*" to avoid instead of the invitation and power to "*clothe yourselves with Jesus*" and live his life of servant love to the world? How many times have you seen in Jesus the harsh judge and the missed the visage of the God who washed his disciples feet and called even his doubters and denier his friends? How many times have you seen him as a "*whatever works for you*" therapist who helps you massage your doubts and fears, instead of "*The Way, The Truth, and The Life?*"

How many of the failures of the church, its members, or yourself have you judged to be only more "*dirty laundry*", without recognizing that if Jesus "shed" the sin he became on the cross, so can his church, your neighbor, and you? How many messengers of God who might share the dinner table or a locker room with you or sit in the cubicle next to yours tried to share the truth about Jesus with you and you shut your ears because it wasn't what you wanted to hear? How many times have you failed to see Jesus "*in a gardener's guise*", asking what you're looking for and you can't really say for sure?

How many....let me count the ways I have. Dear people, take heart, because missing the cues and clues about Jesus' presence with you puts you in pretty good company. He really is alive! He really does come in surprising ways, often in distressing disguises. But he really does want you to know him personally and rejoice in that relationship endlessly. He really did lose his grave clothes but he will never lose track of you or leave you behind. Today you celebrate his resurrection – one day he absolutely promises – he will bring about yours.

So which will it be that you see when you look at the empty tomb - grave clothes or angel's robes? The grave clothes he left behind as a clue....the robes of white – well, he has sized up a pair for you. So Happy Easter you blessed one – today is a really good day to take a really good look at Jesus again. He is Risen! And his Church proclaims "HE IS RISEN INDEED! AMEN