

# **Beloved & Baptized: Now What? (Witness)**

Easter - Holy Communion- April 4, 2010, Leonard Eberhart  
Acts 10: 34-43; Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24; I Corinthians 15: 19-26; Luke 24: 1-12

Harry Potter fans have always cheered when Harry was able to disappear in plain sight under his invisibility cloak. The cloak is just another element of the fantasy in the stories. A recent news account claims that some scientists at the Karlsruhe Germany Institute of Technology have created what is known as a metamaterial, which is used to cloak an object. These metamaterials are tailored to change the way light bounces off something, making light bend around an object to render it invisible.<sup>1</sup> It's a phenomenon that defies the eyes.

We're all familiar with the saying "Seeing is believing." This little ditty suggests one can believe the eyes to give us the whole and complete story. Have you ever seen a good illusionist at work? No matter how carefully one watches and pays attention to every little action, an illusionist can make you think we've seen things that aren't really so.

If we were to look at a composite of the Easter Resurrection accounts today, we'd get a variety of perspectives. The women had gone to the tomb early after the Sabbath to make final preparations of Jesus' body for burial. They weren't prepared for what they found. They however bravely reported the unbelievable news only to be met with disbelief.

Two of Jesus disciples got up from the table and got into a foot race to the tomb to see for themselves. One of them stops short of going into the tomb, the other throws caution to the wind and rushes in to discover it empty. Some grief stricken women were inconsolable upon finding the tomb empty and presume that grave robbers have added insult to injury. They only realize that Jesus has risen from the dead when he calls them by name. There is Thomas the reluctant one who said he wouldn't believe the stories being told about Jesus having come back from the dead until he's able to touch him, verify the scars on his wrists and side. Yet when Thomas does see Jesus, merely being in his presence seems to be enough.

Later there is an account of Jesus meeting two disciples returning to Emmaus, stirring their spirits with his words, warming their hearts with his presence and then opening their eyes when he broke the bread.

Any one of these accounts by themselves might be enough to prompt us to respond in faith. Together however, their combined compelling witness is convincing and convicting.

Today I'm concluding a five part sermon series on the five expressions of our membership covenant. In order for our promise to God to attain it's potential, a balance of these five areas is essential. The promise we

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/03/19/2851100.htm>

make is to “support the ministry of the UMC through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness”. Today I want to reflect with you about what it means to be a “witness”.

Put yourself into the position of any of the early disciples on Easter morning. If only one of them shared the account of what they’ve seen and experienced, it might not be convincing, however when similar accounts begin to surface from a variety of points of view, well, we have to believe it’s not just an illusion. Even two millennia later, when those among us who have experienced and witnessed the resurrection power of Christ at work add our testimony to that of others over the centuries, our combined witness will have an impact of untold proportion.

This resurrection story begins with a very personal, undeniable reality that we are beloved children of God, formed in the very image of the Divine. It’s the love of humankind that prompts God to send Jesus to be born in an obscure stable in an unlikely backwater place like Bethlehem. Then we have our status of belovedness affirmed in our baptism.

So now what? Does it make a difference in everyday life to know for certain that our Creator’s love for us has no boundaries, is unconditional, we don’t have to earn it and it’s simply non-negotiable. What if every waking moment were lived with this awareness and we sought to frame every act and tempered each word we speak accordingly?

How would such intentional life renewing love effect our household, our work place, our board rooms, our social gatherings, our legislative process, our efforts to curb violence in our world? Authentic witnesses don’t just stand behind pulpits, they find a way to offer compelling testimony of what has been vital for them in family business, in the work place, at the town council, or even a chance meeting on the street. We too often defer being a witness of Christ’s transforming work in our lives, because we don’t want to come across like an obnoxious street evangelist. So rather than risk offending one another, we withhold the greatest of gifts - namely letting one another know for certain that we are loved beyond compare.

One of the speakers at the Men’s Emmaus walk last weekend clarified the difference between church work and the work of the church. We can be very actively busy with church activities but until we embody and live out the implications of our belovedness, we will just settle for attending church. If the flurry of all our busyness only consumes our time but doesn’t make a meaningful difference in the lives of people, then what’s the point? Our calling as disciplined witnesses takes us beyond what is familiar and comfortable to do even more than just telling the resurrection story to actually embodying the Good News of Easter. That’s what it means to be a witness in our world.

Our witness can be as simple and profound as how we exchange greetings. It’s common to begin a greeting with “How are you?” - usually not expecting more than a casual “Fine.” What if the Easter news influenced our response to say “I’m blessed!” Such a reply will certainly get the interchange out of the canned dialogue and

maybe even rouse the curiosity of the other person to ask us what we mean by “I’m blessed!” What a perfect opportunity to give our own witness about life emerging from death.

A teacher was testing the children in her Sunday school class to see if they understood the concept of getting to heaven.

She asked them, “If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?”

“NO!” the children answered.

“If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?”

Again, the answer was, “NO!”

Now the teacher was smiling. Hey, they’re getting it, she thought! “Well, then, if I was kind to animals, gave candy to all the children and loved my husband, would that get me into heaven?” she asked.

Again, they all answered, “NO!”

She was just bursting with pride. “Well,” she continued, “then how can I get into heaven?”

A 5-year-old boy shouted out from the back of the room, “YOU GOTTA BE DEAD.”<sup>2</sup>

In telling the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus portrays the father’s display of love for his son “*this son of mine was dead, but now he’s alive!*” In hindsight Jesus’ disciples have come to realize that with this story Jesus was offering a testimony of what was to come, he was an advance witness of the dramatic, unbelievable power of God to raise him from the dead. Then comes the part of the story that contains a promise of resurrection for us too. Isn’t the Easter message a compelling account? This is news that is just too good to keep to ourselves! After having experienced the transforming work of God’s love among and within us, we can’t help but share it - bearing witness to this incomprehensible gift!

---

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustrations\\_for\\_installment.asp?installment\\_id=93040521](http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustrations_for_installment.asp?installment_id=93040521)

## **INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP**

One of the ways we celebrate the resurrection is through the visual image of life represented by the live flowers.

Thank you to all of you for sharing in this witness.

Celebrating resurrection is how we practice faithful stewardship.

The ushers will come to receive our tithes and offerings.

I'll be ready to receive the offerings of the children.

## **PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

**Your risen life is in us, Gracious God, and we delight in rejoicing in what you have done in our lives and in the world. Receive these gifts and offerings, given with joyful and grateful hearts, and use them, we pray, to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ. Amen.<sup>3</sup>**

## **THE BENEDICTION**

How have you experienced the resurrection power of God in your life?

It may be we simply haven't paid enough attention to God at work among us

and need to focus more on the efforts of the Divine.

Where ever you witness new or renewed life,

you can be confident it's the work of the Creator!

Have no fear in trumpeting the power of God's Spirit so that others will experience hope!

Remember the poor and those who suffer.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup>*Homiletics*, April 2010