

I SAW HIM ON THE MISSION!

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

4/11/10

I

When was the last time you saw Jesus? If it's been a while you may have a new opportunity. The shroud of Turin is back on display in Italy. It is famous for its 3D image of what some believe is Jesus at the moment of resurrection. I'm not so sure. Ever since somebody in Israel invited my tour group to view the ancient lean-to beside the road where the Good Samaritan spent the night, I've been a bit suspicious of relics.

The Bible though is passionately concerned that we see Jesus. The gospels go to great trouble to say that after the resurrection people saw Jesus, literally. This was no symbolic experience. The Bible also seems to be even more concerned that we learn to see in a way that goes beyond what our eyes can tell us.

Scripture is dotted with clues which suggest that seeing Jesus does not equal believing in Jesus. Our text says that the eleven remaining disciples stood face-to-face with him. Some worshiped and some doubted! Perhaps seeing him in the ways that count requires a different sort of vision.

II

On that Easter morning when the women see Jesus fresh from the tomb, he doesn't tell them to round up the disciples and meet him here a little later. He says, *Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*

What was important about Galilee? Why not Jerusalem, in the shadow the temple, the center of Jewish religion and expectation?

There was nothing special about the countryside of Galilee. Except that's where they saw him the first time. It was by the Sea of Galilee that Jesus called the first disciples from their fishing nets. It was there he preached good news and healed the sick. It was there that he sat on a hillside and gave them what we call the Sermon on the Mount. It was in Galilee that he invited the twelve to try the ministry for themselves; preaching the good news, healing the sick, and confronting the evil spirits of their time.

Galilee was their neighborhood. It was their home. Jesus was not inviting them to see him in an exotic location. He was offering a meeting in the place of their everyday lives.

If we want to see more of Jesus we'd better look for him where we spend most of our time. I'm all for spiritual retreats and mission trips to far off places, but for most of us they have lasting value only if they remind us to look for Jesus where we spend most of our Mondays. If Jesus is a fond memory from a distant and expensive location then we have not learned to see as we must.

Many of us have to come believe that seeing Jesus is a matter of having a good enough worship service that he'll be persuaded to show up. If the music is powerful enough, the sermon sharp enough, the people nice enough, the coffee warm enough, perhaps we'll see Jesus. Some weeks yes, other weeks no. This story suggests something else. Jesus already is where you are all the time. What we have to do is pray for the vision to see him there, and be willing to join him.

A good worship service is one that helps us to wipe off our glasses and see what's always sitting at the end of our nose and the tips of our fingers. The risen Christ says you'll see me in Galilee; or at least in Snellville. Do we?

II

Jesus' presence is intimately tied to our place. The eleven also discovered that seeing Jesus is intimately tied to our purpose.

What does the present Christ say to these eleven worshiping and doubting believers? *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...* That's why Jesus called the meeting. That's why he gives them the gift of his presence.

Make disciples. How do we do that? He gives three verbs – you *go*, you *baptize*, and you *teach*. Making disciples is the mission. You go to those who are not yet disciples. You initiate, baptize, them into a new way of life, and you teach them the same things that Jesus has taught and is teaching the church.

Jesus seems to reserve his presence for a purpose. Is it possible that the presence of God is most acutely felt where it is most acutely needed? And if we are blasé about our calling to “make disciples” maybe that’s when Jesus is the hardest to see?

Here’s a post-Easter question for the church (and our lives). To what are we committed to becoming and doing that we really need God in order to succeed at it? Are we after anything that apart from the glorious presence of Christ is unlikely to succeed? Making disciples involves the willingness to make changing commitments. If we want to see something different, perhaps it's time to try something different.

If this text says nothing else it says that Jesus is present so his people can get on with their purpose. It is that blessed assurance that makes our mission possible. It is our mission that makes that blessed assurance tangible.

III

Jesus’ presence is intimately tied to our place and our purpose. And then it comes down to willingness to live on the power of a promise. To those eleven who like the rest of us manage to worship and doubt several times a day, he says, *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

When we said “yes” to Jesus Christ, we enlisted in God’s mission in this world that will last till the end of time. We agreed to trust in what God is doing in the world more than any other person, nation, or power. And we committed to live our lives in the light of that future more than any other that appears likely or possible.

Presence comes to people who set about to live out God’s promise. The Old Testament full of those reminders:

- To deceptive and spineless Jacob, the father of Israel, God says *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (Gen. 28:15)*
- And to a reluctant Moses who wanted to do anything but save Israel from Pharaoh, God says, *I will be with you. And this will be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. (Exodus 3:12)*

- To Joshua who received a promotion he never sought, God says, *No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you. (Joshua 1:5)*
- And to an exiled nation of Israel that thought it had squandered its blessings and its future through their unbelief, God says, *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

And Jesus stood on a mountain in Galilee with people like us who manage to believe and disbelieve several times in the same hour and says, *And surely I am with always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)*

This is an invitation to bet the farm, and a promise to be with us when we do.

Someone has said if there's no hope in the future, there's no power in the present. If we haven't seen Jesus lately, what future are we hoping in? What promises are we building our life and eternity upon? Where do we invest our imagination, our money, and our heartfelt desires?

It's not so hard to see Jesus. We can discover that he is present...forever. We don't have to wait to the end of time to see God. We could start this afternoon.

V

People come to church for a lot of reasons. But I have this deep down belief that beneath most of them is this stubborn hope that there is some truth to this rumor of God. At some point folks tire of hearing of hearing other peoples' stories of God. They'd like to have one for themselves.

So what can we do? What secret do we have to tell? Only one. God's been broadcasting his presence since eternity. Jesus has been near you your whole life. You just have to tune in to the frequency.

It looks a lot like a life lived for the mission of God. That has a way of making things clear. Jesus says, tell them they'll see me in Galilee; maybe even in Snellville.

