

“I Have Seen the Lord”

“There was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, ‘You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there.’

The little boy then understood how powerful his words were. He looked up at his father and said ‘I hope you can forgive me father for the holes I put in you.’

‘Of course I can,’ said the father.” (As told by Brett Blair)

That story is somewhat like humanity's history with our Divine Parent. We human beings have allowed our anger and other personal desires to drive wedges between ourselves and God, as well as, with everyone else. Through the covenant with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants, the Creator has sought to lead the Hebrews to become a blessing to everyone in this world. Unfortunately, the Children of Israel repeatedly rebelled and failed in their calling to bless all nations. Their self-destructive actions led to major defeats, the capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the carrying off of many leaders and skilled people to live in Exile in Babylon. God blessed the Jews with liberation through the defeat of the Babylonians by Cyrus the Great. Over 500 years later, after the religious leaders developed a system of self-righteous legalism, the Divine Parent sent the Only Son of God into the world to lead us to the recognition of God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love, Forgiveness, Mercy, Healing, and Radical Welcome for us and all people.

We human beings have done many harmful things to one another and our relationship with the Almighty. Jesus was sent to enable us to come to faith in God's Agape Love for us and to then intentionally live out that New Relationship with God, one another, and all people. Since we human beings frequently and selfishly seek the fulfillment of our own immediate desires, our Divine Parent knew we would not believe in God's Agape Love for us without us being provided the ultimate demonstration of God's Sacrificial Love for us in the Death of God's Son, Jesus the Messiah or Christ.

Our need to be provided the Gift of Faith in God's Agape Love, Forgiveness, Healing, and Radical Hospitality for us is why we have come to remember and celebrate the events of that first Easter Sunday. After Mary Magdalene found the open and empty tomb of her beloved and deceased Teacher, all pretension were gone – she needed to show her love for Jesus through her grief. Mary was compelled to demonstrate the same selfless love for him, which he had shown for her, the other women and male disciples, and yes, even the outcasts of Jewish Society! However, with his body missing, she was even denied the opportunity to show that love, which she intended to be an act of grief – the anointing of Jesus' body.

That is why in the Scripture Reading, it was reported in **verses 11-13**, *“Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. ‘Woman,*

why are you crying?’ they asked her. She answered, ‘They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!’”

God’s and Jesus’ Agape Love found another wondrous expression for Mary, which enabled her to faith in the Resurrected Jesus Christ, as John reported in **verses 14 -16**, *“Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ Jesus asked her. ‘Who is it that you are looking for?’ She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, ‘If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni!’ (This means ‘Teacher.’)”*

“In The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels, Paul Scott Wilson claims that the raising of Jesus authenticated his teachings and his deeds, and that our remembering of them, in the light of our own experience and that of the community, leads us to deeper faith. If we can’t experience our faith, personally, no amount of abstract knowledge will have the power to change our lives.

This empty tomb, then, is about the fulfillment of God’s purposes, the same God who long before spoke of ‘new heavens and a new earth.’” Kathryn Matthews went on to report, “N.T. Wright says that Easter Sunday began this new creation and grounded it in hope (The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions, with Marcus Borg). This isn’t only about ‘my own personal life after I die,’ then, but about God’s whole new creation, God’s new age, a way of being that continually calls us to the table, to reconciliation and healing, compassion and justice, to participation in the wonders of God’s new creation.” Matthews concluded, “There’s a commissioning for each one of us and for our communities of faith to join in what God is doing.” (Kathryn Matthews, Weekly Seeds)

Because the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ revealed himself to Mary Magdalene, she not only received the Gift of Faith in God’s Agape Love for us but she also received her special calling – her way of joining “in what God is doing.” Our Scripture reported Mary’s call in the later portion of **verse 17**, *“But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God.”* Mary was the first human being to testify about Jesus’ Resurrection to others! John reported in **verse 18**, *“So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.”* Mary was faithful to her call!

Unfortunately, the original male disciples refused to believe Mary’s testimony but their failure to receive the Gift of Faith at that moment was not Mary’s responsibility! Everyone has the right and the responsibility to decide the truth for her or himself.

The angry boy learned to take responsibility for his emotions and actions. He also knew his father had forgiven him for those many scars caused by the son’s previous selfish expressions of anger. Our Divine Parent has forgiven you, me, and all of humanity for the many ways we have alienated ourselves from God and one another. God sent the Only Son of God, Jesus the Christ, to be the ultimate manifestation of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love, Forgiveness, Mercy, Healing, and Radical Hospitality. The climax of Jesus’ demonstration of God’s Agape Love for us was his willing Death and Resurrection! Mary Magdalene responded to God’s Agape Love in Jesus through her discipleship, especially her response to Jesus’ body missing from his tomb. God’s and Jesus’ Agape Love was made crystal clear to Mary as the Risen Jesus revealed himself to her. He made her the first witness to his Resurrection and issued her the call to share the Good News with his male disciples. Mary responded to God’s Agape Love and her call by boldly declaring to the disciples she had seen the Risen Lord!

How will you respond to God’s Agape Love revealed in our remembrance of the Death and Resurrection of God’s Son, Jesus Christ? Will you and I follow Mary’s faithful service to her call? Will you and I also live our lives showing God working in us as we live God’s Agape Love and share the Invitation with Everyone? Let us join Mary Magdalene in declaring, “I have seen the Lord!” Amen.