April 4, 2010 Easter John 20:1-19

COME TOUCH HIS ROBE:

"I SAW THE LORD"

Did you see him? Did you see the Lord? Did you go to the tomb and see it was empty? Did you hear the voice saying the Lord is not here because he is risen? That's what this day is all about. HE IS RISEN INDEED! "Risen indeed, yes, risen indeed! Jesus my Lord is risen indeed! Oh death, where is your victory? Jesus my Lord is risen indeed!" That's what the choir sang this morning.

Early in the morning that first Easter Sunday the women made their way to the tomb of Jesus with tears in their eyes and perfume to anoint his body and give him a proper burial. They went together because they had been there at the cross three days ago and time had run out because of the Sabbath law of burial. So now they went to take care of their friend. But a burning question was on their mind, who could they get to roll away the stone? Certainly they could not do it. They knew the guards who were there would not assist them. The disciples, well, they were in hiding still. Who could they get? Who would help them? Today we can answer some of those questions.

Today climaxes Lent. For the last 6 weeks we have been preparing for this day. Our choir has sung so wonderfully different music to help us understand the meaning of Lent and the theme has been "Come Touch the Robe" where

wonderful things can, and did, and will continue to happen to those who have come to touch his robe. They have taken us through his life and the final journey to the cross to lead us to this day, the day of resurrection.

Today is Easter morning. Lively singing, praising God because "Up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over his foes. He arose a victor over the dark domain and he lives forever with the Saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah Christ arose!" What a great God we have that so many years ago he sent us his son so that those who believe in him could have eternal life. He came to this earth willingly…he walked this earth to show the world his Father's love…he picked 12 guys from common backgrounds to follow him…he healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, cleansed the lepers, fed thousands with just a couple of fish and loaves of bread… (by the way he still does all that stuff, because he has risen) he was betrayed, denied, went on trial, suffered on a cross and was buried.

That was Friday, but this is Sunday. Three days later when the women went to the tomb, guess what. THEY FOUND THE TOMB EMPTY! Praise God for he won the victory over death and the grave and because he lives we also live. Because he has ascended to heaven one day he will come back and take those who believe in him to their new homes.

“I saw the Lord” Mary Magdalene told the disciples. He talked with her in a garden. He walked with her in a garden. He shared his resurrection story and told her to go tell the story that she had seen the Lord and he would drop in on them later. But here is the sad part of the story. The disciples didn’t believe her. Like today when I tell the story there will be some who still won’t believe, for if you do believe the story then you would take action and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. John and Peter at least ran from the Upper Room to the grave to see what was happening. Sure enough when John got there he saw the rolled away stone, looked in and saw the empty grave clothes, and stood back as a slower Peter came, looked, went in, came out wide eyed and headed back to the Upper Room. Could it be, he may have thought. Could it be that Jesus had risen? Could he believe Mary? Could he believe what his eyes saw….or better still…what his eyes didn’t see?

His eyes saw the stone rolled away…an empty tomb….grave clothes lying there. What his eyes didn’t see was the body of Jesus. And he knew that he nor his friends had taken it as some wanted to claim. So he left the tomb bewildered, troubled, pondering, could it be true? Could what Jesus said would happen, happen? Is he alive? If so, where is he? Why didn’t he appear to the disciples first? Did Mary see the risen Lord, or was it just her imagination…or even a ghost?

Then there was John, the beloved disciple who beat Peter to the tomb. After Peter left the empty tomb, John went in, looked around, nodded his head, came out

from the darkness into the light, literally and figuratively, smiled, looked to heaven and said to himself, or perhaps even shouted out, “You did it! God you did it! You raised your son to life again! He’s alive! He’s alive!”

I’m telling you folks that’s a great story. In fact it is the greatest story ever told. The tomb could not hold him. Satan’s tricks couldn’t destroy him. The cross couldn’t keep him nailed there. For he has risen and that is what this Sunday is all about.

That’s why we celebrate. But you know it isn’t just that he has risen, he lives today. “He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today.” That is the second thing that we know about the empty tomb. He lives today. There is another hymn that touches us today as well because it tells us these words. “Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future and life is worth the living just because he lives.”

Friends those words are words of hope and resurrection and bring peace. Because HE lives we can face tomorrow. You see, HE IS WITH US! That’s what the women felt as they left the tomb that day. Their dashed hopes were now gone. Their tears of sorrow were turned into tears of joy. Their friend, the Master, the Lord was alive! He lives today!

Listen how Alfred Ackley said it back in 1933 when he wrote, “I serve a risen Savior, he’s in the world today; I know that he is living whatever foes may

say. I see his hand of mercy; I hear his voice of cheer. And just the time I need him, he's always near. In all at the world around me I see his loving care; and though my heart grows weary, I never will despair; I know that he is leading through all the stormy blast; the day of his appearing will come at last. Rejoice, rejoice O Christian, lift up your voice and sing eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King! The hope of all who seek him, the help of all who find none other is so loving, so good and kind. He lives, He Lives, Christ Jesus lives today! You ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart!"

Yes, Alfred H. Ackley has seen the risen Lord. How about you? Have you seen him? Have you seen him when you were going through troubled times? Have you seen him when your life was full of joy? Have you seen him when you have gone through pains in a relationship that went sour? Have you seen him when a loved one has gone on to glory? Have you seen him in your work place watching over you? Have you see him on a ball diamond or golf course or some other game that you might play? Have you seen him at the dinner table when you have conversed with a friend or at the family dinner table when you have broken the bread? Have you seen him during worship in the hymns or the sermon or the faces of the people, or in a hug or a handshake? John Michael Montgomery had a song where a girl went to a new family and went to church for the first time and at Sunday School she saw a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross and said to her

teacher, “I know that man. He came down from that cross and was with me, holding me close the night my mother and father died.” It’s a moving song, I can tell you that.

Have you seen the Lord today? Did you remember when you came through the doors of this church this morning that the Sanctuary would be bright with Easter lilies trumpeting the words of the angel who sat on the rolled away stone, “Why do you look for the living among the dead, for he is risen?”

Have you seen the Lord today? Really, have you seen him? He’s here. He’s here every Sunday. He’s here every day. In fact, you should know he is everywhere you are. That’s the joy of Easter. Every Sunday is a remembrance that Jesus lives. Every Sunday is a celebration that when the women went to the tomb it was empty. Every Sunday this empty cross reminds us Christ is alive and he conquered sin and death. They could have sealed his tomb with iron doors, covered it with dirt, and kept a thousand guards there to keep people away. They could have booby trapped it with explosives. But the results would have been the same. If they removed the dirt, unsealed the tomb, disarmed the explosives, the tomb would still be empty for he has risen. The stone was not rolled away <u>to let Jesus out.</u> The stone was rolled away to <u>let the world in</u> to see that he is not there, he has risen. And folks, it wasn’t just the world that stone was rolled away so that YOU could see the tomb was empty so that you would believe he has truly risen.

Think about that. Think how the disciples had lost hope because Jesus was gone. Think how Peter must have felt because the last thing he remembered was his last meeting with Jesus when he denied him three times and the final time was when the rooster crowed and their eyes met and Peter ran outside and cried because rattling in his mind were the words of the conversation they had few days ago when Peter said he would never betray him, but Jesus told him before the rooster crows a third time he would deny him three times.

Think about the conversation in the Upper Room those 3 days while Jesus was in the tomb. They may have confessed what they had done, their doubts, and their unbelief's. Why had they run away? Why didn't they defend Jesus? Why didn't they stay with him till the end? Why were they afraid even now? How long would they need to be in hiding? What would happen now? What will they do now?

All those questions. Then to find the answer when Jesus appears to them in the Upper Room and shows them the holes in his hands from the nails, and shows them his pierced side and says "Peace be with you….it is I, Jesus. I have risen."

It's an amazing story. Many have tried to say it could not have happened. Some have tried to prove without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus didn't rise from the grave. But most of these people have come to a final conclusion after further study that the tomb was empty because Jesus had risen.

This morning we celebrate. We've a story to tell to the world. On Christmas we shout that Christ so loved the world he gave us his son so that all who believe in him can have eternal life. We shout "Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new born King." On Easter we shout to the world the women found the stone was rolled away and the angel said that Jesus had risen. We shout the victory song, we shout our 'amen's.' We shout "Up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over his foes."

I'm telling you we have something to shout about. Our Lord has risen. He's alive! Easter people raise your voices in praise to our God for Jesus is alive! He has risen and lives today.

Have you seen the Lord? Have you seen him today? I hope you have. For he truly lives in my heart and I hope yours. So let us tell the world we've seen the Lord today, and that he lives in our hearts.

The Choir has concluded our Lenten time singing "Worthy is the Lamb." But I want us to remember the story. I want you to remember the invitation to come touch his robe. Any given Sunday following worship, or when God touches you, you are invited to come to this altar to meet God and let him touch you. So this morning, I have asked the Choir to close our Easter Celebration by singing one more time, "Come touch the Robe" as our benediction. And if you so desire….as

you leave come touch his robe… who knows, another miracle might just happen..

Happy Easter! He is risen indeed!