

Easter Sunday/April 16, 2017

John 20:1-18

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"Easter Signs"

I love signs. Just ask Kate. Whenever we go on a journey, whenever we travel in the car, I look for the signage. I grade a place, a state or a county by its signage. Are the roads all marked clearly? Are there names of both roads or streets at every intersection? Are there signs along the highway that tell what gas stations, hotels and restaurants are at the next crossing? And do they tell you how far each of those are off of the highway? (I really dislike turning off for a gas station and then driving an unknown distance to find it). When I drive up to an intersection with stop and go lights, is there signage before I get there, that tells me what lane I should be in? (There is nothing worse than being in bumper to bumper traffic and discovering too late that you are in the wrong lane!). You get the picture? I have a great respect and appreciation for places that do good signage!

In John's gospel we have had some very good signage! All through Lent we have been hearing about it. You see, in John, the miracles are considered signs, as each one points to something. They point out to us what the realm of God is all about and John uses them to tell us who Jesus really is. So, for instance, the first miracle story in John is the wedding at Cana. Jesus, after being told the wine has run out, turns 6 large clay jars of water into wine, about 180 gallons. This is a sign that points to the abundance of God's love and grace available to all. Not only is there a lot of this wine but it is wonderful, the best tasting stuff anyone has ever had!

So then, we had the story of the healing of the man born blind, pointing out how so many who think they know everything about anything, who think they can "see", are really "blind", and those who society has deemed "blind" because of their disabilities, their low status in life, or their undesirable qualities, are really the ones who, because they are open to Jesus' message, are the ones who can really "see!"

And then we had the story of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus' good friend, who had died. A pre-figuring of the resurrection story, this points to Jesus as *"the resurrection and the life"* and that all who believe in him will know eternal life.

But not only does John use miracles to point toward Jesus. He uses people as signs as well. We had Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to meet and speak with Jesus in the dark of night because he didn't want anyone to know he was talking to this rebel of a rabbi. In their conversation, Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to enter the realm of God, he must be "born again" or "born from above." The interaction with Nicodemus points toward life in the Spirit, which is more than life in the flesh, the life that Nicodemus seems to be stuck in. But we continue to hear about Nicodemus throughout John's gospel and by the end, wonder if he has indeed become a true follower of Jesus. So, unknowingly, good old Nic is also a sign that helps us understand the spiritual life of the realm of God.

Then there was the Samaritan woman at the well. She too was a sign that pointed us toward the "living water" that is Jesus. Here we see Jesus breaking all social convention, by speaking with a woman he did not know, and a despised Samaritan at that! This sign points to the openness and inclusivity of the realm of God. Of the concept of God as Spirit to be

worshipped not only in specific holy sites, but everywhere. Here too, we see her as a sign, as she goes and tells all of her fellow villagers about Jesus, the one she thinks may be the promised Messiah, and she becomes the first evangelist in the gospel.

But today, we celebrate the greatest miracle of all, the most amazing sign in the gospel stories, the resurrection! And surely for John, this is the ultimate sign. It points to Jesus as the one in whom we should put our faith, as he writes near the end of his gospel, *"Now Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."* (20:30-31).

So what are all these signs about? What is this "life" John speaks of having in the name and spirit of Jesus? Here in our sanctuary, all Lent we have been trying to make a point. Each week we have been removing or changing something. First we removed the Communion table. Then the railings. Then the chancel furniture and the pulpit. Then we closed the shutters and blew out the candles. We have been trying to make space, space for the garden of resurrection. Trying to prepare ourselves, open ourselves up, make space within ourselves, for the possibility of new life and transformation.

Because what good are signs if they do not point toward the future, point toward that which is down the road, to that new place we are going, to a place that holds something different. A place where we are transformed into new creatures. Is that not what the spiritual life known in Christ must be about? And are we not, each of us, to be **signs** ourselves, pointing out for each other, the truths that we, unique and different as each of us are, have come to know in the love and compassion of Christ?

Here at First Church there are many who are **signs** of the realm of God here in our midst. The **group** that met here yesterday to create this beautiful Resurrection Garden. They are a sign. The **cooks** who gave of so much time to prepare and to serve today's Easter Breakfast. They are a sign. The **choir**, whose dedication and commitment to practicing and singing week after week bringing us the music that enlivens our worship. They are a sign.

Those **dedicated** to the leadership and to the future of this community of faith. They are a sign. Our **teachers** who give so much of themselves for the development and growth of our young ones. They are signs. The **children** in our midst, whose words and actions so often give us a real glimpse of God's realm. They are signs. These people who have just become **new members** of this church family, who bring excitement and enthusiasm and hope to the life of our congregation. They are a sign.

I think of some whom we have recently **lost to death**. Avis Howells, Georgia Randall, Lillian Gilpatrick, all part of a generation who formed this church in the last century and whose faithfulness to this church set an example for many of us. They were signs. Paul Krohne and Sid Toll, both more recent additions to our family, who shared their expertise, knowledge and wisdom with us. They were signs. Young Kal Ihnken, whose love for life and exuberance gave us an appreciation for the youth among us. He was a sign. And Betty Collins, who was always around to lend a hand and probably part of nearly every dinner or fair held here in the last 50 years. Truly a sign.

On this Easter Sunday, can we become the signs of Christ's love and presence for one another?

Are we willing to open ourselves to the Spirit of Christ's compassion and allow ourselves to be pointed toward, and pointers to, a new and deeper way of life?

Will we as a church, commit ourselves to working for the good of all, for justice and peace and equality among all peoples, giving fully of ourselves, as Christ gave of himself?

The **Spirit** and **love** and **joy** of the **resurrected Christ** is among us! May we be open to the transformation awaiting us in that Spirit.

Christ is risen, Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed! Amen!