

Resurrection Day 2023
Sermon 4.9.23

Colossians 3:1-4

If, therefore, you were raised together with the Anointed, seek the things above, where the Anointed is sitting at God's right hand; Set your mind on the things above, not the things on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with the Anointed in God; When the Anointed, our life, is made manifest, then you too will be made manifest along with him in glory.

Matthew 28:1-10

But after the Sabbath, at the dawn of the first day of the Sabbath-week, Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary came to *view* the tomb. And *look*: A great earthquake occurred, for an angel of the Lord, descended from the sky and coming forward, rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightening, and his raiment was white as snow. And those who were standing guard were shaken by terror at him and became as dead men. And speaking out the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you *seek* Jesus who has been crucified; He is not here; for he was raised, just as he said; come *see* the place where he lay. And go quickly, tell his disciples that he was raised from the dead; and *look*: He precedes you into Galilee, where you will *see* him. *See*, I have told you."

And, quickly departing from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to announce it to the disciples. And *look*: Jesus met them, saying, "Greetings." And, approaching, they took hold of his feet and prostrated themselves before him. Then Jesus says to them, "Do not be afraid; go announce to my brothers that they should depart into Galilee, and there they will *see* me." (298)

I caught a glimpse of Christ a few years ago. It was in an unlikely place, but why should that surprise me? It's always in an unlikely place that you glimpse Christ.

This was on a TV show. Christ showed up, a character you'd barely notice, someone who was there and then gone, just one last glance at her to see where she ended up.

Billions is a high-production cable drama. Well-written, well-acted, it involves a hedge fund billionaire, fast and loose, and the district attorney whose life mission it is to bring him down. It's a mimetic relationship they've fallen into, each doing things largely to troll the other, mirroring each other though always seeking that one leg up.

The hedge fund billionaire came from nothing, considers himself a man of the people. Charismatic, hopping in his helicopter from house to house, he's the high priest of our neoliberal age, creating wealth out of hedges and hunches—hocus pocus.

The DA is high-born, old money, taking taxis from the East Side penthouse where his father still lives to the brownstone where he's raising his family—or hiring the people who will raise his family, or managing the person who will hire the people who will raise his family.

Somewhere in all this is an Hispanic woman. A good employee of one of them, one on whom a well-run day relies, she's also undocumented, has been in New York for most of her life but never with citizenship. It comes to light, this fact. And in the one's attempt to get at the other, she gets exposed, and forced to move to where she does hold citizenship. A country she doesn't remember, a country in Latin America, maybe South America, where she knows no one and has nothing.

You see it coming as the viewer. You see that she's a point of weakness for the one which the other can toy with. She's a chink in the armor. Her being liked and relied on, and also vulnerable: this is the thing.

It's nothing. She's nothing. Five minutes of plot (but the five minutes I remember the most.) I mean, it was a loss to the one who relied on her, a gain to the one who made the other one lose. Other than that, though...

But you see it coming. She's there, in the twisting plot of the story, there doing her job, dusting or picking up the kids or packing the helicopter. (These powerful people really can do nothing for themselves.)

She's there. And then she's gone. And the one is so angry—and pledging vengeance. And the other is victorious, but only for a moment because tomorrow's another day and now he's got a new target on his back.

And one last glance: she gets off a rickety bus in a dusty village where she looks like all the other people there but is utterly alone.

She's nothing.

She's Christ, Christ crucified, while the powers-that-be continue their plotting.

See, you have to look for him. See, you have to seek him. Our gospel reading tells us as much. Ten times in ten verses: view, look, see, seek.

You gotta wonder whether Pilate even remembered Jesus—Pilate the governor who likely oversaw hundreds of crucifixions, maybe thousands. The man of the empire, the local bureaucrat of the wider imperial dominion, Pilate: you gotta wonder whether he even remembered Jesus—like a few days later. Could he have picked him out of the crowd of people he'd likely sent to the cross, recalled that face, recalled that reasoning?

Maybe that reasoning. The whole circumstance had been so strange that maybe this one stuck. This man who'd stood silent before him as he faced wild accusations, this man who didn't

even bother to make a case for himself, a privilege (private time with the governor!) that most headed for the cross could only have dreamed of—and he made nothing of that privilege.

It's likely that Caiaphas would have remembered him. The High Priest whose domain was both Temple and all the people Israel: he was just looking out for the well-being of his people, these whom Rome would come after given the slightest unrest, the slightest provocation. And the people were beginning to show signs of unrest, real unrest. They had, it seemed, begun to act in hope that life could be better than it was. (There's nothing more threatening to the powers-that-be than a people who hope.) Indeed, they'd begun to act in hope that life could be better even for *them*, down to the one.

Even you, who are nothing: maybe even you are one for whom God desires blessing, desires wellbeing.

Maybe.

Hope: it's hugely disruptive.

So, Caiaphas: he'd done the math and had come to the right conclusion: "It's better for one man to die than for a whole nation to suffer." And suffer they would have. If one of their own was claiming to king? Those are fighting words to the ears of the actual king. It's called sedition, when the one who isn't king claims or is claimed to be king.

And sedition isn't pretty when it meets imperial justice.

Caiaphas was wise to guard against that.

Because what's worse than one man claiming himself to be king is a whole and growing people who claim this one man to be king. And his only claim to kingship is in his giving the people hope—this one intolerable thing. Because again (and how many times do I have to say it?) there is nothing more threatening to oppressive power than hope, real hope. If you're an imperial power and you need to hold whole wide swaths of land and people under your rule, the first thing you need to do is get that wild hope under control, maybe even stamp it out altogether.

It's always amazing to me where hope shows up. Because some people in some circumstances have little cause for it. And yet it there it might be, arrived like a revelation, arisen like a resurrection. It can be in as unlikely a place as where Christ might show up.

And it's a good thing, too, because hope is like bread, our most basic sustenance, without which we could barely live. But hope is also our highest art form. The things we can do with it! We make art of hope. We make music of hope. We form hospitals for the hopelessly unwell with hope. We make schools and higher learning out of the bricks and mortar of hope. We fill potholes

with hope. We plant gardens with hope. One of the prophets of long-ago Israel, in beating back wealth-seeking Babylon, urged the people not to fall prisoner to Babylon's crass, exploitative ways, instead to be and ever to remain prisoners of hope.

Jesus was giving the people hope. Jesus had spent the length of his ministry giving cause to people to hope, people who otherwise would have had little cause to hope, people who'd have little cause to think of themselves at all, so little did the world think of them.

Those who'd spent their whole lives in hard-scrabble nothingness: these were rather people, it seemed because of Jesus, whose lives mattered. Those who'd been lame and worthy only to beg and maybe, every once in a while, to receive meager charity: these were rather people whom the Lord would prefer to visit and where God would act. Against every assessment the world has to offer about people and their ordinary, sort-of-hard but also make-do okay lives, Jesus would see and recognize, bless and raise. And this would begin to introduce hope—that most threatening thing to those who want things settled, settled so their seat on the top doesn't wobble.

As it happens, yesterday, in an article in the *New York Times*, Esau McCauley similarly warned about hope—though less for what it can do to the power structures of the world and more for what it can do to a person. In an article I'd urge you to read if you haven't already, he writes: "I have never been a big fan of hope. It's a demanding emotion that insists on changing you. Hope pulls you out of yourself and into the world, forcing you to believe more is possible."

A Black man, McCauley remembers being a Black boy in a poor neighborhood with a household that was always about to descend into chaos amidst a wider public that seemed it could not care less. So, he knows: "Hate is a much less insistent master; it asks you only to loathe. It is quite happy to have you to itself and doesn't ask you to go anywhere."

Now a professor at Wheaton College and Theologian in Residence at Progressive Baptist Church in Chicago, he continues: "Jesus offered the dangerous kind of hope...the belief in the possibility that things might be different," which might indeed be the most unnerving aspect of the Resurrection of Jesus. "...the indestructibility of hope might be the central and most radical claim of Easter — that three days after Jesus was killed, he returned to his disciples physically and that made all the difference.

"Easter," he rightly concludes, "is not a metaphor for new beginnings; it is about encountering the person who, despite every disappointment we experience with ourselves and with the world, gives us a reason to carry on."

This Resurrection morn: this is brought to you by powers and principalities that clash, that exploit and oppress, that mimic each other to get that but one leg up: it is for such as these that we get crucifixion, that we get the sacrifice of the little ones so the world can find its level, its “good enough,” its “this will do,” its hopelessness or at least its “whateverness.”

This Resurrection morn is also brought to you by that within each of us, which is so tired, so worn down. It has been quite a dispiriting few years in so many ways, which I won’t recount here because you already know. You already know. And it would simply be easier to retreat to our corners with our internet connections where we can just troll each other until rage becomes our food.

This Resurrection morn is most of all brought to us all by the Lord God who lives and reigns, who says, “No” to these ways of exploitation and oppression, “No” to that within us which enervates and undoes, “No” though he submitted to them—the powers and principalities; “No” though he submitted to embodied life which can indeed enervate and drain of hope—all in order then to say “Yes” to the ones who get crushed and forgotten, “Yes” to the ones whose lives are nothing (so says the world) or the ones who live their days just trying to do the right thing, to live modestly and love faithfully and work helpfully and be true to their word while feeling evermore tired, evermore defeated, “Yes” to the endurance of hope, the strength of faith, the reliability of love to save everything it touches which is everything there is. Love is everywhere. It sticks to everything.

We are a Resurrection people, among whom new every morning is the love, the opportunity to love, the opportunity to create anew in hope, the chance once again to connect and build.

Look around: see the body of Christ.

Like the women, you go out into the world assuming you’re viewing the tomb. But, brace yourself, because you might instead glimpse Christ, crucified, raised, and on the move once again.

Thanks be to God.