

he is the one

Acts 10:34-43

April 16, 2006

Look around you. What do you see?

I see my wife and my three children and my three children's special friends. I see a new puppy in the house, and a new grandson, named for me, too far away. I see Michigan parents spending Easter with us in Iowa, and a Maine parent, in Maine, too far away. I see all those who are so dear to me, all those who have made my life worth living.

Look around you. What do you see?

I see a church celebrating a very special anniversary. One hundred and fifty years! One hundred and fifty years worshiping God and serving the community and taking care of each other, and still going strong. I see a church proud of its past and hoping, hoping, it will enjoy a vital and dynamic future.

I see people, hungry and thirsty, hungry and thirsty for meaningful relationships, for meaningful work, for meaningful faith. People hungry and thirsty for passion and energy and purpose in their own lives and in their life together.

Look around you. What do you see?

I see a town preparing to break ground for a new casino, a town eager to inject new vitality into its economy and into its cultural life, a town eager to remake itself, but still deeply divided over how to achieve these common goals.

I see a town of extraordinary diversity, but little unity, not so much one town, as many towns sharing a common space, many towns coexisting within common geographical boundaries.

Look around you. What do you see?

I see a nation struggling with its immigration policies, torn between a legacy of welcoming newcomers and a growing fear of "strangers."

I see a nation struggling to provide affordable access to its unrivaled health care system, torn between a legacy of compassion for the disadvantaged and a distaste for "handouts."

I see a nation deeply polarized and growing moreso every day: very rich and very poor, black and white, gay and straight, religious and secular, very right and very left.

I see a nation struggling with the dilemma that it can do almost whatever it wants to do, but that large parts of the world's peoples resent it for doing it.

I see a nation motivated more and more by fear, and less and less by a passion for justice.

I see a nation losing its soul, frittering away time and energy and resources on trivial pursuits, mortgaging its children's future to feed its own insatiable appetite for pleasures and conveniences, trading away its grand vision of just community for a tawdry vision of personal gain.

Look around you. What do you see?

I see Jesus.

I see the living Jesus, calling me, calling you, to live faithfully, to live in hope. I see the living Jesus, calling me, calling you, to follow him.

Because he is the one. He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life. He is the one.

As Peter said to Cornelius and to all those gathered with him in his house, you know the story. You know who Jesus was. You know what Jesus did.

You know about his message, the message of the Good News of peace, the Good News of God's shalom, a promise for the future, but also a present and experienced reality.

You know about his ministry, how he went about doing good and healing wounded people by the power God had invested in him.

You know about his integrity and his compassion. You know about his uncanny air of authority and his genuine humility. You know how he made small people feel big and big people feel small. You know how he invited everybody, big and small, to taste the mercies of God. You know that he was despised and rejected, ridiculed and abused and killed, because he posed a threat to the status quo, a threat to the powers that be, a threat to any who put faith in themselves.

You know the story. But today we proclaim the rest of the story, the best part of the story, the part of the story Cornelius and his household did not yet know: *The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all!* Jesus is that stone. Jesus is the cornerstone. He is the one, the Lord of all!

They put him to death, but God raised him to life. They judged him, but God appointed him judge of the living and the dead. All of us, all of humanity, those already dead, and those, like us, still living, are called to appear before Jesus to be judged, before Jesus the One we crucified, before Jesus the One God raised to life, before Jesus the One God made Lord of all.

That would be terrifying, truly terrifying, to be subject to the judgment of this most righteous man, this man who is said to be seated at the right side of Almighty God. That would be terrifying, if we didn't know who Jesus is. It is through Jesus, through the power of his name, that all who come to him for judgment believing in him, will have their sins forgiven. All who put their trust in him will be forgiven, entirely forgiven. Lord Jesus, judge me!

This is the rest of the story, the best part of the story, that Jesus is alive. We put our faith, not in the Jesus who was, but in the Jesus who is. We don't follow him where he used to go, but where he is going now.

That's why we can never imagine that we have Jesus all figured out, that we know everything there is to know about who he is and what he expects of us. He is still teaching us, still leading us, still bringing his own spirit to life in our spirits.

Jesus is alive, guiding us now, healing us now, loving us now, judging the living now as well as the dead. And so we put our faith in Jesus not merely for the sake of life after death, but for the sake of life before death! The power of resurrection is now at work in us, bringing us to life, transforming us into his image. In Jesus we find our true identity, our true purpose, our true direction.

We are most ourselves when we are most like him: tolerant of people, intolerant of hypocrisy; fearing no man, but fearing God; giving everything, asking only for love in return; putting love first, above every other virtue, above every other value, love without condition, love without limit, love that goes all the way, not just so far as fear allows.

Look around you. What do you see?

Do you see Jesus?

Do you see people around you, people all over this globe, believing in Jesus, listening to Jesus, following Jesus, not using Jesus as a weapon to achieve their own aims, but offering themselves as tools to achieve Jesus' aims?

Do you see the power of resurrection at work among people: people coming to life, people being reborn, people receiving forgiveness, people being healed, people being reconciled to each other, people living with joy?

Do you see the power of resurrection at work in this world: in a witness for peace that will not be derailed by fear or by "political realities?" In a tireless dedication to justice and to fullness of life for all people that will not be discouraged by any setback or any opposition? In a persistent message of hope, that we do have a future and that that future is grand, that a new world is coming and that it is already being born?

Do you see the power of resurrection at work in you? Do you feel the breath of Jesus breathing new life into you, strengthening you, shaping you, filling you with joy?

Jesus is alive.

Do you see him?