

## **The Presence of the Lord**

### **Psalm 114 and John 20:1-18**

**Easter Sunday at Brentwood Presbyterian Church, April 4, 2010**

I imagine most of us have experienced  
the death of a close family member or friend.

We felt shock, unbelief, remorse, regret,  
and, above all, loneliness.

Something was missing.

Something was gone.

There was a hole in our existence.

Eventually, much of that hurt healed  
and we moved on with our lives.

We came to realize that what we love

becomes a part of us,

blended with mind and memory,

honoured forever within our souls.

But the initial experience is one of loss and loneliness.

Mary Magdalene was filled with loss and loneliness  
as she entered the garden where Jesus had been buried.  
Imagine the additional shock when she found the tomb empty.

Her first thought was that someone had moved  
or even stolen the body -

sacrilege heaped on top of sorrow.

Simon Peter and the other disciple arrived,

saw the empty tomb,

and were filled with the same confused outrage and anger.

Then something truly miraculous happened.

Jesus came and spoke.

Mary saw and heard the living presence  
of the resurrected Lord.

She mistook him for the gardener at first,  
but one word – her name – opened her eyes and heart  
to who this truly was.

Jesus was a living presence.

Death had not taken him away from her.

He was with her as friend and teacher,  
the living Lord whose mission continued.

His assurance to her and request to her

are significant.  
This is the heart of the Easter message.  
It's not the empty tomb,  
but the living presence of the Lord,  
still teaching with assurance and inviting people to witness  
to the reign of God's *shalom*  
that has conquered even death.

The assurance is that Jesus is returning to his and our Father and God.  
If you remember the rich tapestry of Jesus' teaching  
in the weeks prior to his death and resurrection  
as John recorded and interpreted it,  
you will recall the promises  
that the disciples would be with Jesus  
wherever he was.  
If he is going to be with the Father,  
they will be with the Father also.  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
are a community  
into which humanity is being incorporated  
through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.  
With Jesus Christ, we are restored to a flourishing eternal life  
that begins here and now.

Life, in all the fullness that God intended for human beings at creation,  
is restored and revived in the Resurrection.  
Through Jesus Christ, it is available to all.  
We will all be together with the Holy Trinity  
in the everlasting dance of flourishing life.

That's what Jesus asks Mary to go and tell.  
In this telling, the church begins.  
It's one lonely human telling other lonely humans  
where flourishing life can be found.  
It's these people together nourished and celebrating  
the presence of the Lord.

I remember one of the things that impressed me most  
when we told each other last fall  
what we valued most about the church gathered here  
at Brentwood Presbyterian.  
It was the depth of conviction that God was with us.  
It was the power of knowing that the Lord was present,  
with us and for us.  
We come to know of this presence ever more thoroughly  
in worship and learning, in fellowship, and in service.

Our life as a congregation  
is all about enjoying the presence of the Lord  
and warmly welcoming others to experience that delight as well.  
In this, we are the heirs of Mary Magdalene in the garden.  
We too are being invited to go and tell  
how flourishing life flows from being in the presence of the Lord.

When we hear and answer this request from the Lord –  
“Go and tell ...” –  
we step more fully into a story that began with Creation.

It is the story of God’s loving intention  
for a world that bursts with well-being,  
with the harmonies of a peace that passes understanding,  
with the riches of God’s *shalom*.

In Psalm 114, the worshipping community  
remembers the presence of the Lord in the Exodus –  
deliverance from bondage to be the friends and agents of God.

On that first Easter,  
God continues to be present and acts in Jesus Christ  
to free us from the bondage of death itself,  
to move us from fear to faith.

He does this so that we can go and tell others  
where they can find nourishment for a flourishing life,  
so we too can go and tell the story of God’s presence and power.

The world into which we are telling God’s story,  
into which we are witnessing to God’s presence  
and its power to nourish a flourishing life,  
is a world of alienation, fragmentation, and confusion.  
Our neighbours are separated from each other in fear,  
divided from each other in hostility,  
and confused about the true meaning of life.

Into this world, we are called to tell the story of God’s *shalom*,  
God’s presence and power to bring people together  
into a new humanity modelled on the ways Jesus Christ was present.

We are called to tell about and to be a community of peace.

When we welcome each other every Sunday morning  
with the peace of Christ,  
we are being different in this world.

We are exhibiting what the presence of the Lord does to people.  
It makes them friends in Christ,  
a powerful and positive presence in this world.