

### **John 20:19-30**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Jesus and Thomas

But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

The Purpose of This Book

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

### **“Come and See”**

**Rev. Charles Schuster**

**Easter Sunday April 12, 2009**

Friday night, here at the church, Friday night a 40-piece orchestra, our adult choir took on Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, one of the most difficult pieces of music ever written. I've been in churches where the adult choir tried to sing hard music, and you just hope they get through it without having to stop and start over, and you kind of hope that maybe they get to the end of it and everybody still be on speaking terms... Friday night, our adult choir and a 40-piece orchestra took on Rossini, and Rossini lost, we won. It was magnificent. Thank you to our choir, thank you.

The last piece of the performance, there was another piece of music while we took up an offering, but the last piece of Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, it was the only piece of the whole work that I could understand what they were saying, because it was in French. (It was in Latin. You have to bait them every now and then.) The one piece that I understood was that last piece, when they all got together and sang, "Amen. Amen, Amen, Amen." It went on for a while. Amen, Amen, Amen. The tenors would sing Amen, it is finished. And then the sopranos would come in, Amen, and it was finished. And the even the basses and the altos, they were singing Amen, Amen, Amen. It is finished, it is finished. Good Friday, it was finished.

Frank Lymon tells the story of a community theater that wanted to do something about the crucifixion, a play that they had put together, and so they were getting their cast, and they had this guy who was a truck driver to play Jesus, and it had to be somebody like him, because they had to carry a cross about like that, he had to carry it, so it had to be somebody big and kind of strong. And then they got a professional actor to play the role of the Roman centurion, and he was small, but he was a great actor, and he really got into the part, and he screamed at Jesus, and he spat at Jesus, and he mocked at Jesus and he poked at Jesus, and the truck driver Jesus maintained his role, but everybody wondered for how long. Finally, after having had his fill of this, the truck driver Jesus turned to the small centurion with the big mouth and said, "I'll be back to deal with you after the Resurrection." Jesus said, "It is finished." Jesus said it on the cross, "Amen," and God said, "I'll be back to deal with you after the Resurrection." After the Resurrection - Easter - this morning. When we think it's finished, God says, "It's just beginning. Just beginning."

Sometimes we think it's finished because we live with regrets, things we've done. It is finished, we think. Nothing more to do. Adam and Eve in the garden, for example. David on the roof, leering at Bathsheba. Sarah's jealousy over her stepson Ishmael. Even Jesus, overturning the tables in the temple of the money-changers. What have I done? What have I done? The story of Harriet, who said to her husband Irv one morning, "Last night I dreamed you gave me a pearl necklace for no reason at all. What do you think that means?" Irv looked at her and said, "You'll know tonight." That evening he came home with a package. He gave it to her. Was it the necklace she dreamed of? Delighted, she opened it. It was a book. It said, *The Meaning of Dreams*. Before that evening was over, he thought, "What have I done?" And she thought, "It is finished."

Let me tell you about Ted. Ted's wife Carol died several years ago. He gave me permission to tell this. He may even be here. Death came after a long illness. He struggled with what to do after her death, with his loneliness, his identity. He made a decision to return to their hometown in California, got up the courage, got in his car, about year ago, five years after Carol died, drove cross-country back to California, got off on the wrong street, got lost, maneuvered his car into a turn lane. Maybe it was reliving his grief, maybe they had made changes in the town. Maybe it was a degree of disorientation. Ted's driving record was better than most. Ted was not driving under the influence of anything other than grief, and there's no law against that. But he made a right turn that was a wrong turn, because he didn't notice the bicycle lane, and he hit Michelle, a wonderful young woman, a great teacher, inspired, a light in the darkness for at-risk kids. "I wanted to comfort her," he said. "I wanted to tell her family I was sorry, but there was nothing I could say, there was nothing I could do" and she died at the scene. Ted commissioned a painting to be dedicated to Michelle, to be sent to the school where she taught. What else could he do? It's an awful thing to live with. And who among us, in one degree or another, doesn't understand this?

I got an email this week from a person who visited our church, who thought for some reason we weren't religious enough, and took exception to my statement that one of the purposes of the church was to make the world a better place. This visitor wrote an email

saying that the recycling group in her neighborhood has that as an objective, and the church really ought to be trying to win souls to Christ. Okay, I was in a bad mood, and I emailed her back, and I shouldn't have. And I said in my email, "It seems to me your recycling group may be more Christian than your church, at least it interests me more." I'm not proud of that. I told the others on the staff, and the other four ministers got together with me and one of them looked at me and said, "Chuck, we're worried about you. You're just not yourself lately." They should be worried. I regret that. We all have these things we regret. When we told an untruth and got caught. When we hurt someone and we didn't mean to. When we lose it, and wish we had controlled it. We have regrets. To live with regret.

Jesus said it's finished, and God said, "Come and see, it's just beginning." Tomorrow is a new day. Good Friday is followed by Easter, don't forget that. There's hope for us. No matter what we've done, no need for regret. No matter what is done to us. No matter what we've done, sometimes we think it's over. No matter what is done to us, sometimes things are done to us, and we think it's over, it's finished, both Testaments, old and new, every person. Job wanted to curse God and die, because of what was done to him. He lost everything. Israel in exile, wondering why they would be called the Chosen People, and would pray frequently, "God, choose somebody else." It's what is done to us.

One person said, "What you need to make a small fortune on Wall Street is a large fortune." Look at what happens. Look at what is done to us. It makes you want to retreat. Charles Schultz was interviewed and they asked him, "Mr. Schultz, if there's one thing you could reverse, one thing you could change, one thing you would do differently than you've done, what would it be with your Peanuts cartoons?" And he looked into the camera- you've heard me say this before - and he said, "Well, maybe I should have let Charlie kick the football once." In the cartoon, she always pulls the football away, and Charlie Brown misses it and falls down. Two years ago on Christmas, a young couple in the church heard me refer to this, and they brought in that framed poster that you saw, had Charlie set up to kick it, and there's a look, if you look at it closely, there's a look on Lucy's face that says "Hah" and there's a look on Charlie's face that says, "This time." And then the poster's words: "Never, ever, ever give up." And I nailed that poster to the wall of my office, and one week after Christmas, I was proud to have it, and two days after I nailed it on my wall, she came in to see me. She attends the church. Her life had been hard. She has a job, but her daughter was in the hospital, her husband had had a heart attack, her father was ill, money was tight. "I need to retreat," she said. "I don't know how I'm gonna make it. I want to just quit. It's over." And there were tears, and there was really nothing I could say. But she looked at that poster, and she read the words out loud: "Never, ever, ever give up." And I said to her, "That was a Christmas gift to me from members of the church, but I think you need this worse than I do, so you take it with you," and she did. She took it. Two years ago. She took it home. She wanted to give up. She took it home. Apparently she looked at that almost every day, and this past week, she came back with the poster. The people in the office said she had a smile on her face, I didn't get to see her, but I read the note she wrote. It said, "Thank you for the poster. Life is good for me now. I just wanted to bring this back so that you could pass it on to somebody else."

When you lose your job, never ever ever give up. When you lose your health, when you lose your mind, when you want to retreat.... Randy said it, and he said it right. He said, "Walls.... walls are for other people to hold them back. Walls are for us so we can climb them." When bad things are done to us, when disappointments happen, even Jesus said "It is finished," but God says, "No it's not, it's just beginning. Come and see." It's Easter. No need to retreat. There's hope for us. What have we done? We live without regret. What has been done to us? We never retreat. And at the end of life, when we think it's all been said and done, it isn't. It's never done.

Carol Burnett was right when she said, "Comedy is tragedy plus time." It's never over. We do not live with resignation. The most powerful part in the Bible I think is the part where the disciples decided to resign. They thought they were done. It was over. They were in mourning. The cross had claimed its victim, they went back to wherever they came from, they resigned. And I don't know what happened. Was it a miracle? Was it the miracle of all miracles? Was it resurrection from the dead in a physical body? I don't know what happened. Nobody does. Scriptures are confusing. But this seems clear. The disciples wanted to resign, and something happened. Something turned them around. It wasn't over. It still isn't over. This is Easter. This is what we came to hear. Grief gives way to joy, death gives way to hope, what was lost is found, Christ is alive. In many ways our loved ones live. It's memory, it's love, it's the one thing that stands, Paul said, when all else has fallen.

Georgia died this week. We had her funeral here in the church. She wasn't a member of the church, you may recall, because I've spoken of this. She called me up one day and she said, "I heard you do a pretty good funeral, and I'm dying. Would you do mine?" She went to the mortuary to pick out her casket, and she chose one that was just a little above her price range, because she wanted to see how the other half lived, and she asked the mortician to put a reading light in it. Georgia picked out a grave marker, talked to the stonemason who carved it, had him chisel a camper like the one she owned, and then somebody fishing on a stream, which would have been Georgia, catching a fish, of course. The stonemason said he'd never met a person who stood over him while he made the grave marker. She signed her initials. You can see it there. He said, "Georgia, you're a different kind of bird." She was. Once, she was on a trip to Mexico with some of the members of the church, this is where I got this story, and she had purchased a bunch of bananas, and they wouldn't let her through Customs with the bananas, so she went over in the corner and ate them, and passed them out. Well, she paid for them. She was a census-taker, and one time she was taking census and she was in this trailer park, and there was this couple waiting for the minister to come, because they were going to get married, and the minister was a little late, so they asked her to stay, and she did, and she signed as a witness, and at the reception she continued to ask them the questions that a census-taker has to ask them. She had this thing that she'd say to me, as if I didn't know it. "Chuck," she'd say, "with God, all things are possible." She wanted to hear one of our worship services. She couldn't get here, lives in the neighborhood, but couldn't get here for Sunday morning worship service, so I took her a CD of one of the services. I think she wanted to check out the preacher, just to be sure. The bell choir played that day, she

heard them say that there would be a concert that night. She was interested in that, and she wanted a CD of the bell concert, so I took her one. In a little bit, she called me back over again. She wasn't very polite about it - "I need to see you" sort of thing. So I went over there, and she was so taken up by the bell choir that she gave me a check for \$350. And we're going to put her name on one of the bells, it's this one. It's the c7 bell. It's Georgia's bell. It's a little bell, but it plays a lot, and when the bell choir plays, and they will be doing this in a couple of weeks, you're going to hear it. that bell will ring loud and clear. It's that way, you know, Easter reminds us bells still ring in our ears and memories still flow from the past, and the good will always be. Love will not die. When we're done, we're not. Come and see. (Crash) I don't know what that was. Is everybody all right? The choir's all right? That was Georgia. And I'm a little spooked.

There is hope for us, no matter what we've done. There is hope for us, no matter what has been done to us. And there is hope for us when we think our lives are done. Good Friday, Jesus said, "It's finished." Easter Sunday - God said, "Nah, it's just beginning." There's hope for us. Come and see. No need for regret, retreat, or resignation. It's not finished. Christ the Lord is risen today. That's not a hymn, only, but it's also a fact.