

“Hear and Believe the Words of Christ”

John. 20:1-18

Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

It is so good to say “Alleluia” again. All during the Lenten season, we focused our attention on the suffering and pain of Christ’s humiliation. During our midweek services, the Quincy pastors rotated among the churches and proclaimed Christ’s words from the cross. I was given the opportunity to preach Christ’s words, “It is finished.” Then, on Good Friday, we turned our attention to His final words, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Our Lord’s words as He was dying were simple, yet very enlightening for us to hear and ponder.

As we gather to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, it is appropriate to continue our focus on the words of Christ – here also, they are simple, yet enlightening.

The first thing Jesus says to anyone after the resurrection is to repeat the question posed to Mary by the angels, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Notice that Jesus is not being coy or trying to trick her. He asks, “‘who’ are you looking for?” not “‘what’ are you looking for?”

And Mary in her depth of grief simply wants to know where the

body is so she can, it is implied, give Him a proper burial. She is looking for a “what”, not a “who.” She is looking for a body from whom the spirit has departed.

Then Jesus calls her by name, “Mary”, and she recognizes him. As Jesus told His disciples, the Good Shepherd calls His sheep by name, they know His voice. Also He said, “I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Jesus did not allow Mary to recognize Him until He called her by name. This has such great implications for understanding our life of faith as well. We confess in the Third Article of the Creed as is written in Luther’s Small Catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.”

Recognizing God is not something that we can do without Him first calling us to faith. We are the sheep of the Good Shepherd who hear His voice calling us by name. Only then can we answer that call. Until our Lord calls us by name, we are wandering around not knowing what we are really looking for.

Just like Mary, immediately after our risen Lord called us by name in Holy Baptism, we recognized Him. Faith was created – followed now by understanding.

What joy we have this Easter morning celebrating life: the life of Christ as He was raised from the dead; celebrating our new

life of faith as our Good Shepherd has called us by name and brought us into the peace and serenity of His tender care; and we celebrate the promise that just as He is risen, so shall we rise one day. We confess our faith in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Christ is in us, and death and the grave have no hold on Christ. Therefore death and grave have no hold on you or any of the saints. This is the joy of Easter. This is the joy of this festive morning and this festive season.

For the next six weeks we will continue to exclaim our simple yet enlightening words Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!! The message of Easter is simple. There is no trick. There is no plot twist. The Word of God comes to you and calls you by name. And you hear and believe. Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!! Amen.