

Sermon: I have seen the Lord

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St Giles Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, April 4, 2021, Easter Sunday)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Camp d'action biblique (or CAB) is a Bible camp jointly supported by the Presbytery of Quebec and the Presbytery of Montreal. It is located near the town of Richmond, about 2hr drive from either city. Two to three hundred kids pass through the camp during a typical summer, usually on 6-days weekly sessions catering to campers of various age categories in either English and/or French. The richness and vibrancy of CAB really should be credited to the long-time camp director Randy Johnston and a dedicated team of volunteers and staffs he has gathered.

From 2011 to 2018 while serving as the minister of my former congregation in Montreal, I regularly spent a week during the summer serving as camp chaplain. In that capacity, I got to know Randy and the ministry of CAB fairly well. Let me tell you that Randy is a really interesting fellow. He has a down to earth demeanour, refer to me 'brother', I suppose we are brothers in Christ. In his youthful years, he got involved with street gangs, did some time in prison, and somehow found Jesus and was forever transformed. During the off season, Randy serves as a regular supply preacher at a nearby local Presbyterian congregation. He also works as a high school counsellor, helping trouble teens. Some of those teens went on to be trained and serve as faithful counsellors at CAB, sharing their transformed lives with many others.

During my time at CAB, I had observed and participated in an interesting tradition called 'the final banquet'. It usually happens on a Friday night, the last supper of a particular group of campers. The staff would rearrange seating of the cafeteria into a banquet hall style, with festive decorations adorning the walls. Fine table cloth would be laid out tastefully, with plates and utensils set properly. Campers would be assigned their own seats, with their names printed on a card. They are expected to dress formally, well as formally as one could expect from kids age 8 to 16. The cooks would prepare a fine feast — with choice meat, healthy, nutritious,

and tasty food — the finest that campers could've enjoyed during the entire week.

At the beginning of the Last Banquet, Randy would give his talk, explaining to the campers why and what they are celebrating. He would explain the meaning of the 'marriage supper of the lamb' — the final feast that God and humanity will celebrate together in that heavenly banquet. It is a vision that is laid out clearly in the book of Revelation, that finds supporting passages in various other books of the Bible, including our reading today of Isaiah 25:6-9, "*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*"

The purpose of that celebration is the final victory over death, as in "*He will destroy on this mountain, the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.*" It is a victory where God will wipe away all tears, God will take away the disgrace of the people of God, when they waited and waited for their Lord to save them. When that long awaited deliverance finally come, the people of God will be glad and rejoice in the salvation of the Lord.

This conquest of death is not strictly a future event, as explained by Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 5 and 6. It begins with Jesus when he dies a sacrificial death for sinners. He then conquered death when he rose from the grave. The passage we have just read in John 20:1-18 described that resurrection, focusing on the reactions of three individuals — Peter, John and Mary Magdalene — those who first witnessed the empty tomb.

While Peter saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the clothe that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself, John saw the same thing and believed. Although both of them must have heard numerous times, from the mouth of Jesus of his own prediction of death and resurrection, neither of them understood what they were seeing. We are not entirely sure of what they believed, they then returned to their home.

But not Mary. Mary stayed behind in the empty tomb. It was there she first met the two messengers of God, who questioned why she was weeping. It was there she encountered the risen Lord, though she did not recognize Jesus at first. It was in the act of Jesus calling her by name, that Mary came to see, to accept the reality of what she was seeing — the Lord is risen indeed.

We could almost feel her emotions, the range of her emotion transitioning from grief to puzzlement, to bewilderment, to joy, then finally to exhilaration, though that is not the focus of the Scripture. The focus was on what she did immediately — Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “**I have seen the Lord**”; and she told them all the things that Jesus had said to her.

I have seen the Lord. In making that announcement to the disciples, Mary Magdalene became the first evangelist in proclaiming and witnessing the risen Lord — Jesus is alive, He lives! I could just picture at that moment when Mary gave that first testimonial, angels and heavenly hosts burst out singing:

Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord;
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his name.

Countless others would pattern their lives, their actions to that of Mary Magdalene. Some actually saw the resurrected Jesus, as the Lord did appear to others subsequently in the Gospel accounts. Yet, many others see the risen Lord, not by their naked eyes, but by their hearts, deep in their souls. For two millenniums, they would go on to proclaim the risen Lord, with words and/or actions, testifying how the resurrected Christ has changed them, transformed them forever.

Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord;
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his name.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.