

I have seen the Lord. That's Enough

April 20, 2025

David Schilling

God, may these words reflect the light of your presence in all of us, our strength and our salvation.

After setting up the cross garden yesterday, we were discussing the challenges of church in Vermont, declining membership and what we are going to do with all of those buildings. Yet, here we are...here we are, over 100 people gathered in a space to celebrate something as complicated as the resurrection of Christ, something our eyes have never seen, and will never see. I'd imagine that more than a couple of us are beyond a little uncomfortable with that. It doesn't come up much in our day to day lives, Emmanuel, God Incarnate, being born of virgin birth in a stable, walking around performing miracles, transforming water into wine, walking on water, silencing storms, feeding thousands with practically nothing in hand, and rising up from a closed tomb, promising to return. Not common conversation on the job site, in our business meetings, in our schools. I've overheard many conversations at Sarduccis and the Wayside on busy days...never those topics.

Yet here we are. Proclaiming Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God (although some have pointed out we do have an easier time when we sing it).

There is one part, though, that is more present in our lives...that part about speaking truth to power, resisting evil within empire, being persecuted for it, yet not giving in, not relenting. Daring and inviting us to break the cycle, if only as a promise of someday.

David Schutz said something that resonated with me: we might be the most secular state in the nation, rightfully so by God, yet I believe our actions are

amongst the most Christian. We might be uncomfortable about speaking this truth but we have no problem living it.

When our sister Rumeysa Ozturk was pulled off the street and detained for crimes still unknown, we demanded that she be returned to this state, until someone can actually articulate what she did wrong. When our brother Mohsen Madawi was arrested during his citizenship hearing for the crime of speaking up for the rights of peaceful Palestinians, not terrorists, we immediately ordered him held here, so we could be sure he would not disappear until some..any...evidence could be provided of his wrongdoings.

When our brother Captain Jason Gray was shot and wounded protecting his community from violence and fear, we raised thousands of dollars for his care within a week, and escorted him safely home to his family with a procession of nearly two dozen vehicles accompanying his 65 mile journey.

As I've grown so fond of saying, with increasing frequency out of necessity, these are not political statements, they are rooted in the teaching of Christ. From the book of James, "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

This is not to say state boundaries keep out injustice - plenty of it certainly surrounds us each day. But it does speak to a willingness to stand up for something that we cannot see, guided by an internal sense of righteousness as faith. We don't need to see it to live it.

Mary Magdalene, whose name we learned last Easter could be translated as prophet of towering faith, had no doubts. She returned to the other disciples, and changed the world in 5 simple words: *I have seen the Lord*. Her illuminating pronouncement was met with doubt by those who needed to see...more...but she was unwavering in her belief, eventually echoed by the others after Jesus revealed himself to them as well.

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In the words of Diana Butler Bass,

“I can offer no proof. I can’t explain what kind of resurrection. Literal, physical, spiritual, mythological, experiential, metaphorical — writers know such labels feebly describe that which we struggle to explain, the truest things escape the bounds of words. I have no historical evidence or scientific theory. I don’t know which tomb or what hill or how any of this could be possible. Twenty centuries of theological argument has obscured more than it has clarified.”

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This cycle of belief-before-proof repeats itself time and time again in our world. Arrested on a fake charge of prostitution in a 1920’s attempt at character assassination, Dorothy Day had no context for experiencing a world without poverty, but she believed in it as surely as she believed in the resurrection, and she didn’t back down.

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Imprisoned for 27 years for sabotage of an oppressive system, Nelson Mandela had no reasonable expectation of a South Africa free from the institutionalized racism of Apartheid, but remained firm in his belief that to deny people their rights is to challenge their basic humanity. He didn’t back down.

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Sojourner Truth, born into slavery and sold four times, believed in a world with equal justice for women and people of color. Leaving the relative safety of a free New York behind, she felt called by spirit to preach the truth, and

traveled the country speaking out and helping enslaved people escape to freedom.

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Woody Guthrie was a strong admirer of Jesus Christ, despite his disdain for organized religion. He had never seen a world with economic justice and fair labor practice, but nonetheless, he believed in the millennial return of the working-class carpenter, who would bring peace, equality, and justice to the world. *"When the Rich will give their goods to the poor", he said, "I believe in this way. I just can't believe in any other way. This is the Christian way and it is already on a big part of the earth and it will come."* He didn't back down.

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When he became aware of just how deeply his religion was being used as a tool of oppression, David Connor set out to craft his own subversive ministry, which held human safety and justice as its bedrock principle.

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Jesus was born into a troubled and turbulent world, was killed by a troubled and turbulent world, and left behind a troubled and turbulent world that has persisted for nearly 2,000 years.

We will not make the darkness vanish overnight, but here we are, celebrating rebirth and resurrection, remembering that each point of light we shine helps.

At the beginning of Lent, we put away our Alleluias. We celebrated the transfiguration by holding these ribbons and praying over those mountaintop moments, where we were held in God's light, doing exactly what we were born to do. We held those marbles in our hands and dreamed

of where we might find ourselves after 40 days of reflection, restraint and growth. Each week, they sat with us through the darkness, out of our sight but ever present. Today they return, proudly and triumphantly. May each one provide a beacon of light bringing us closer to our God, and the world we believe in, even if we can't see it.

Irish poet and playwright Seamus Heany says it beautifully:

*Human beings suffer,
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured*

...

*History says, don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.*

*So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.*

*Believe in miracle
And cures and healing wells.
Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain*

*Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky
That means someone is hearing
The outcry and the birth-cry
of new life at its term.*

Here we are, a larger than normal group in this brave little secular state searching for renewal, the reasons that brought us here sometimes as complex and unclear as the resurrection itself.

May our moments on the mountaintop, the glorious strengths that guide our being - and our hopes and dreams for a world emerging from the shadows of lent - build that tidal wave that brings history closer to hope. May we hold firm that our belief in a world filled with justice and mercy still waits around the corner,

May we take one more step closer to being the miracle that brings it to light.

Alleluia, friends. Alleluia.