

Easter – 2025
Isaiah 25:6-9
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
John 20:1-18

“Behold the man” (John 19:5). Pilate said it; Pontius Pilate. Behold the man. The Lord Christ is brought before a hostile crowd. Jesus was a sorry sight. Swollen from abuse, bleeding from being whipped, bruised, beaten, afflicted – the Son of God couldn’t have looked more pathetic. Behold the man. Pilate was mocking the crowd as well as mocking Jesus. The King of kings was vested in a purple robe and wearing a cruel and ridiculous crown of thorns. Some in the crowd knew that Jesus was not just a man, but truly God. Pilate was mocking them. Some held that Jesus was a threat to their nation, a false messiah who undermined their law. Pilate was mocking them. Behold, the man. Here is the man that you find so threatening, so dangerous. Behold, the man. Here is your messiah who is a bug that Rome can easily crush. What do you see?

Have you ever been to a funeral, a churchly funeral? There is only one reason to go to a church for a funeral. There is only one reason that funerals are held in churches. People go to churches for a funeral so that they can behold the man. In the midst of death, there is a risen Savior who is to be beheld. In the midst of great loss, Christ’s resurrection speaks to who we are, what living is all about and where we are headed. Behold the man. Behold the risen King of Creation. Behold the One who sets us free from sin and death. The death of a loved one is put in the context of Christ’s life, His sacrifice, His resurrection, and His present rule and reign. Behold the man. What do those at a funeral see?

Have you had days where you legitimately feel special, feel loved, feel elevated, superlative, empowered, blessed? Birthdays are pretty sweet. Anniversaries, graduations, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day; the day you retire; the day that you receive a promotion – that’ll make one feel pretty awesome. What do you feel about yourself today? Mary went to the tomb feeling pretty lousy. Her heart felt crucified. The shame that Jesus suffered, the hate that He endured... that colored Mary’s morning and it colored it dark. Friday was torture. Friday was a radical rejection which God suffered at the hands of men. He allowed it. Mary saw the surface and the surface was wretched. She saw the pain and the pain was wretched. Mary goes to the tomb and she sees what she does not understand. The stone is taken away. The corpse is missing. She runs to the disciples. Peter and John are eager to investigate. John tells us that John believed, but nothing more (John 20:8). John tells us that they didn’t understand (John 20:9). Yep, I’ve been there. Then it’s just Mary. Then it’s just Mary, an empty tomb, a missing corpse, a couple of angels and a risen Savior.

“Woman, why are you weeping?” (John 20:13). First, it’s the angels asking. The question is not designed to obtain information. The question is a gentle reproof. By this time, Mary should not be crying. There’s nothing wrong with crying. Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb. But the angels aren’t crying. The One to whom Mary will soon speak is not crying. Jesus asks her, “Whom are you seeking?” (John 20:15). How many layers does that question have? What kind of Messiah were you expecting? That’s one layer. What sort of God do you think has called you to Himself? That’s another layer. In this place, who are you looking for? The question is put to

you. Are you seeking a “feel-good-god”? Are you seeking a god that fits in with your mimosa and recreation centered lifestyle? Are you seeking a god who will affirm every choice that you make and never call you to repentance? Are you seeking a God who will be there at your husband’s funeral, comforting you with His endless strength, His endless grace, His endless love and His mighty resurrection?

Do you think that it’s odd that the pastor should be talking about funerals on Easter? Funerals are such a downer and this is a happy day. Don’t kill my religious buzz, bro. Yeah, maybe you’re right. Or maybe you’re wrong. We’ve had three memorial services just lately, and one more is coming on Saturday. Do you know what the whole point of a funeral is? Behold the man. The Lord Christ is lifted up for those who are hurting so that they know, SO THAT THEY KNOW, that death has no sting. Behold the man. His wounds are perpetually fresh. His resurrection glory pierces the soul. His power is infinite to claim those who have no power of their own in their mortal struggle against sin and Satan and death. I feel pretty good today. Today is way better than a promotion. Today towers over graduations and Father’s Day and even my 50th anniversary – which will be pretty awesome... *in twelve years*. Today, I’m a child of heaven. Today, no casket can hold me. Today the Lord is risen and death is a meaningless husk that lies on the floor defeated by a crucified King. I feel pretty good today. Behold the man.

Do you know how Jesus revealed Himself to Mary? He called her name. How many times had He done that before? Do you think that her name sounded more lyrical in her ears as Jesus spoke it on Easter? Do you think that Jesus conveyed that He knew her, loved her, that her life was secure in Him as He spoke her name there at an empty tomb? Mary. I know my sheep and they know me. I call them by name and they follow me (John 10). The Good Shepherd called Mary by name on Easter and her eyes were open. Behold the man. Your name is written in the book of life. The ever-living God inscribed your name in the book of life (from eternity) because the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep and you are a sheep in the Shepherd’s church. Joe, Russ, Delores, and Irene – those are the sheep who heard the Master call their name and they followed Him. Those believers are with Christ. Our brothers and sisters, who celebrated Easter all their lives, who beheld the man by faith in this life, now they see Him face to face.

You’re not staying here forever. Somehow, some folks think that that is a bad thing. Holy Fright, that is the opposite of a bad thing. The reason that you feel so good today, the reason that this holy house is so full today is that we all want to go to heaven. Christ is risen and that’s where we’re going. A guy was dying by Jesus’ side and the Lord said the most marvelous thing to him: “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” The dying thief beheld the man and asked to be remembered in His kingdom. Isn’t that you? Your sin, real and unjustifiable and laden with the promise of severe judgment, was placed on Christ and He suffered mightily to bring you to paradise. Behold the man.

Shepherds ran to the stable after hearing the angels (Luke 2:15). Behold the man. Wide-eyed, some at the wedding knew that He had changed water in wine (John 2:9). Behold the man. The disciples saw what they thought was a ghost until He spoke and then they knew that it was their Lord walking to them on the water (Mark 6:51). Behold the man. The pastor elevates the host and the chalice and chants the words: The peace of the Lord be with you always, and the faithful see the crucified King who is really present in the bread and wine. Behold the man. Jesus paid

the price. His blood justifies us, makes us holy, washes us of every stain. Those who have this faith animating their hearts are way more likely to forgive others, way more likely to use their gifts in service to Christ's church, way more likely to distance themselves from the cultural slop of selfishness, greed, lust, glamour, possessions and a raging tribalism that is all around us.

A buddy of mine texted me this week and said, "Hey man, I just don't get John 12:25. Break it down for me, will 'ya?" For those of you who haven't memorized the bible, John 12:25 says "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." My bud enjoys a lot of things in this life and he was wondering whether or not he was a heretic. No. It's a Semitic idiom, a figure of speech. Hate and love is a way to compare things when one is way better than the other. There are many sweet things in this life. God has given them to us and us enjoying them is what the Giver desires. Family, a pleasant home, a strong body, the ocean, mountains, rivers, the pursuit of excellence in education, to make something with your hands, to enjoy a fine meal, athletic pursuits – God doesn't want you to hate these things. But compared to us going to heaven, compared to holding fast to our crucified King – all that just drops by the side. The reason that you feel so good today is that you intuitively know that.

Behold the man. Pilate meant it as a dis on our Lord. We see Him aright. On this blessed Easter morning we haven't forgotten Good Friday. All the witnesses at the time were too blind to see it. What they saw was disgrace, pain, weakness, frailty, humiliation – to be sure, it was that. But there's more. What do you see? Behold the man. He is risen. His sacrifice has restored our fortunes. Death is not our Master. Our risen King is our Master. He is alive. He rules this world and He has made you His own. His glory makes this day exceedingly bright. Behold the Man.