

Time With God
John 20:19-23, Revelation 1:1-2, 9-10, 12-13

Earlier this week, I read the remarkable story of Ms. Mavis Jackson. Mavis lived in Anaheim, California, and for a period of 20 years she drove past Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral without ever stopping to worship there, despite often saying to herself, "Someday, I'm going to go." Then one Sunday, out of the blue, she decided it was time. Putting on her Sunday best, she drove over to the Crystal Cathedral and found a seat somewhere in the middle of the church. Looking around, she marveled at the beauty of the place and was soon enraptured by the music of the choir and the congregation.

After the service, Mavis stood to go and said to the young woman standing next to her, "I'm so glad I came today. Wasn't it wonderful?" The young woman nodded and then Mavis asked, "Are you from around here?"

The woman said, "No. I'm from the Midwest. I'm actually here on a mission to find my birth mother." Mavis was silent for a moment and then said, "I know how you must feel. A long time ago I had to give up a little girl for adoption. I didn't want to but..." she said, her voice trailing off in sadness. The young woman looked at Mavis and then asked, "Do you remember her birthday?"

"Yes," said Mavis. "It was October 30th." The young woman gasped and said, "That's my birthday!" And yes, you guessed it. That young woman proved to be Mavis' Jackson's daughter. Her name was Cheryl Wallace.

Seems no one in Cheryl's small Midwestern town knew just what had become of her birth mother – Mavis Jackson – but someone thought Mavis had moved out to Orange County, California. So, Cheryl went looking for her and found her, quite by accident, on that sunny Sunday morning in the Crystal Cathedral!¹

Coincidence or providence? Accident or God? Who's to say? In fact, I can't even swear to the truthfulness of that story since I found it on the internet and all of us know the internet is not always the most accurate source of information. But here's a story I know is true because it recently happened to me.

Not more than two weeks ago I was suffering from a bit of anxiety; there was something bothering me and, try as I might, I just couldn't put it out of my mind. After worrying about it for far too long, I decided to take my mind off of things by cleaning my yard which was littered with the accumulated debris of winter. As I was gathering trash and other things from my lawn, I noticed a crumpled piece of paper stuck among the bushes, so I picked it up to get a closer look. The page was badly stained and the ink was faded in spots, but most of the words were still quite legible.

Turning it over in my hand, I realized that it was a well-worn page torn from an old Episcopal book of worship! Unfolding it slowly, I read the words of John's gospel – words

¹ *When God Winks at You* by Squire Rushnell. Located on April 26, 2019 at: <https://www.beliefnet.com/inspiration/2006/10/when-god-winks-at-you.aspx>.

assigned to the 2nd Sunday of Easter – words I would be called preach from in just a few short days – words I am preaching from today. “When it was evening on that (first Easter day), 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.’” (Jn. 20:19) How timely those words were for the first disciples! And how timely they were for me on that anxious afternoon. They were just the right words at just the right time!

How long had they been there? Who could tell? But I found those words at just the right moment to calm my anxious soul! Coincidence or providence? Accident or God? I would say – God! You see, we Christians believe there is a Kind Mind behind the happenings of our world. There is a Powerful and Passionate Presence with us all the while. There’s a Great Goodness that watches over us and is with us all the time. And though we might not necessarily credit everything that happens to us as something sent by God, we certainly give God credit for every good and perfect gift that comes our way! (Ja. 1:17)

My friends, this is the second Sunday of the Easter season. It is the season of resurrection. And the resurrection reminds us, among other things, that God is with us still! For the resurrection is the preeminent sign of God’s continued presence with us...even to this day!

You see, in the incarnation, God revealed himself to us, in and through Jesus Christ. The bible says God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. (2 Cor. 5:18-19) That means God came to us in Jesus Christ to show us his love, to teach us his way, and to do all things necessary to save us, salvage us, and bring us back to himself. And when his teaching and example offended our sensibilities and challenged our cherished habits, we nailed him to a tree. Then we took him down, buried him in a cave, and rolled a stone over the entrance as if to say, “That settles that!”

But you can’t kill God! The God in Christ rose from the dead as if to say to us, “Do you worst and I’ll love you still!” And then he appeared to his disciples – to his doubting disciples, his deserting disciples, his denying disciples – he appeared to his imperfect disciple on that first Easter evening and said, “Peace be with you!” (Jn. 20:19) Peace, with all of it’s rich and varied meanings of tranquility, harmony, and concord – security, safety, and prosperity – felicity, happiness, and wholeness. “Peace be with you!” he said. You see, he was truly alive and truly with them. So, later they would say to Thomas, who was absent at the time – later they would say to Thomas, with straight faces and full sincerity – later they would say to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” (Jn. 20:25)

Yes, the resurrection reminds us, among other things, that God is with us still! For the resurrection is the preeminent sign of God’s continued presence with us...even to this day! He lives! That’s the Easter declaration! And because he lives, we can meet him still! That’s the testimony of the apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John. And that’s the testimony of another John, John the Revelator, who wrote the book of Revelation, the last book of our bible.

Like many scholars, I tend to believe the book of Revelation was written by someone other than the apostle John. You see, the apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, but the

original Greek of that gospel and Greek found in the book of Revelation is so different that it probably wasn't written by the same hand or the same man. Also, like many scholars, I tend to believe that the book of Revelation was written sometime in the mid-90s A.D during the reign of Domitian, a Roman ruler who embarked on a terrible persecution of Christians throughout the Roman empire of his day.

Why is this important? Because if this is true then John the Revelator encountered Jesus some 60 years after Jesus' resurrection, proving that Jesus continues to be with his people throughout time. And John not only encountered Jesus, but he encountered what we Christians call the entire Godhead – that one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – yet one God – the blessed Trinity!

This is how John described his encounter with that one God: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw...I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest." (Rev. 1:1-2, 9-10, 12-13)

Now I have to admit, that's bizarre and baffling language, but here's my point. Drawing a line from that first Easter evening when Jesus appeared to his disciples in an upper room, through John's experience some sixty years later on the isle of Patmos, you can see how that line points forward to this place and this time, and assures us that we, too, can encounter God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even in our own time and place!

Yes, maybe God lives, after all! Maybe he's alive today! And maybe he can lead a long-lost mother and a searching daughter to a sweet reunion on a sunny Sunday morning in Anaheim, California. Maybe he can blow a wrinkled piece of paper with just the right words into my yard at just the right time to bring me a bit of comfort! And maybe, just maybe, he's here this morning, for you! More than just maybe...he really is! And the resurrection is the sign!

Two weeks ago, our Stewardship Team introduced this year's stewardship theme challenging us to give our time, our talent, and our treasure to God. Currently, they are encouraging us to spend some time with God through daily devotions of worship, study, and prayer. Now this would make no sense at all if God were not alive and active in our world. But the resurrection and post resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ, like those we've looked at today, assure us that God is very much alive and active in our time!

Sometimes this God comes to us unexpectedly, as he came to those first disciples on that first Easter evening, surprising them by his sudden appearance. Or as he came to me as I was minding my own business and cleaning up my yard. At other times, God comes to us as we are seeking him through worship, prayer, scripture, and reflection, just

as he came to Mavis Jackson and Cheryl Wallace as they worshipped at the Chrystal Cathedral. Or as he came to John the Revelator while John was in the spirit on the Lord's Day – Sunday – praying and meditating on God's word. And we know he was meditating on God's word because the book of Revelation contains literally hundreds of allusions to the Hebrew scriptures. In the words of one commentary, "While Revelation does not have a single direct quotation, there are hundreds of places where John alludes in one way or another to the (Old Testament) Scriptures. Swete mentions that of the 404 verses of (Revelation), 278 contain references to the Jewish Scriptures... (And one Greek New Testament) cites over five hundred (Old Testament) passages in connection with the book."² Just think of that! So, God visited John on the isle of Patmos on the Lord's day as he worshipped, prayed, and meditated on the scriptures. He can do the same for you!

My friends, on this, the second Sunday of the Easter season, I want to remind you that God is truly alive and active in our world. The resurrection and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus all point to this truth. As do the testimonies of many people in our own day who have met him. This means he might just disclose himself to you at any moment. But especially in those moments when you are seeking him. "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you," the bible says in James 4:8. That's the promise of scripture!

So, let me encourage you to follow the example of John the Revelator. Set aside some time for worship, prayer, study, and reflection. Visit the Stewardship Team's table in the narthex for books and resources to help you in this endeavor. And who knows? Maybe, just maybe, the living and active God will reveal himself to you as he revealed himself to John in some marvelous and meaningful way – a way that might change your life forever! It could happen! It could happen to you! Will you give it a try? Will you spend time with God? You think about that. Amen!

² *Revelation* by Alan Johnson in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12 edited by Frank Gaebelin. Published by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p. 411.