

## We Can See Jesus

Spokane Friends April 5, 2026

By Leann Williams

We come this morning along with people all over the world to celebrate Easter, a symbol of the new life and the energy of spring, the end of winter darkness and the spring equinox that brings increasing light. For Christians it is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus after his death on a Roman cross. For me, it is a lesson that in the darkest of times the story isn't over. There can be life after death.

The Bible is full of stories where things looked hopeless, but the story was not yet over. Abraham was promised by God that he would be the father of a great nation. When Sarah, his wife, was old and still childless, it looked hopeless. She carried out a plan to have a child through Hagar, her servant. But that was not God's plan, and the story was not over. At 90 years old Sarah finally had her child, Isaac. Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were sent out to the desert. It looked like they were going to die there, but the story was not over. God led Hagar to a well. They did not die and Ishmael also became the father of a great nation.

Other stories come to mind. A favored younger brother, Joseph, bragged to his brothers and caused them to resent him. They put him in a well and sold him to a caravan as a slave. It looked like a disaster for Joseph, but it was not the end of the story. With many twists and turns to the story Joseph became a powerful man in Egypt and saved Egypt from a famine and was reunited to his family. Jonah ran from God's instruction to preach to Nineveh and headed to Tarshish in a ship. He was thrown overboard and found himself in the belly of a great fish. It looked like the end for Jonah, but the story was not over. He was spit out on the shore, preached as he was told and Nineveh repented despite Jonah's bad attitude.

Easter is a reminder to me that whatever story we find ourselves in, the story is not over yet. There is room for hope.

When I realized that the Easter message for Spokane Friends would be my responsibility this year I was a bit concerned. I grew up in church hearing pretty much the same message every year. What could I add that would bring a unique perspective? It turns out that I didn't need to create a new slant. There was a story within the story that I had never really heard before. I'm sure I read it but somehow I missed it. So, before I begin, I'd like to state that any resemblance to current political persons or events are purely historical and should not be construed as a political commentary by this speaker.

There's a conspiracy going on in the account of Jesus' death and resurrection. It's important to understand who the players are to follow the story. The main character is Jesus, a poor and homeless indigenous person living in a territory occupied by the powerful Roman Empire. He

was born to an unwed Jewish mother in a small farming community about 6 miles outside of Jerusalem and raised the son of a carpenter in Nazareth about 60 miles north. When Jesus grew up, he became an itinerant teacher or rabbi and gathered followers along the way. He claimed to have authority from God to perform miracles of healing and to interpret the Jewish scriptures. He gained attention and popularity among the religious and sinners alike.

His popularity and nontraditional teaching caused the Jewish religious leaders to take notice of him. The Pharisees interacted with Jesus most often. They were generally laymen representative of the common working folk. They held oral traditions to have equal authority with written scriptures. They believed in the resurrection of the dead and an afterlife of reward or punishment. They also believed in angels, demons, and spiritual realms. The Sadducees represented the wealthy Jewish ruling elite, the high priests. They held to a literal interpretation of the scriptures and considered oral tradition to be manmade holding no authority. They did not believe in resurrection, an afterlife, or spiritual realms. They had a vested interest in keeping the Romans happy so that they could retain their wealth and power.

The Sanhedrin was something like the Supreme Court of Israel. It included both Pharisees and Sadducees. When crowds started following Jesus, the Romans started paying attention to him as a potential threat to their authority. The Pharisees and Sadducees of the Sanhedrin united to conspire with the Roman authorities to have Jesus put to death.

Jesus preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Any talk of a kingdom other than the established Roman rule could be a threat to the political system. When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover, crowds welcomed him. The Romans were quick to put down any sort of insurrection. Though Pilate, the Roman governor, found no evidence of insurrection, the sign he had hung above Jesus on the cross identified Jesus with the words, "This is the King of the Jews."

Jesus taught with authority that challenged the Jewish religious system. Jesus took his followers beyond the "thou shalt nots" of the 10 commandments to the heart of the commands. He expanded "do not commit murder" to stating that if you are angry with a person without cause, you are guilty. He expanded "do not commit adultery" to if you even look at a person with lust you are guilty. He expanded "love your neighbor" to love your enemy as well. Jesus did not advocate strict adherence to the law but rather encouraged his followers to look to the spirit of the law which requires greater sensitivity and discernment and is more difficult for authoritarian leadership to control.

In Matthew 12 and Mark chapter 2 we read the story of Jesus and his followers pulling off the heads of ripe grain and eating them on the sabbath because they were hungry. Any work on the sabbath was forbidden by Jewish law. Jesus declared that the sabbath was made for man. Man was not made for the sabbath. I understand that to mean that religious or spiritual practices

are intended to deepen our spiritual lives. Our lives are not to be lived to serve a religious system. Following this event, Matthew 12:8 states, “Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against him how they might destroy him.”

In Mark 12 Jesus is asked what the most important commandment is. His answer was to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself. A scribe responded that doing that would be better than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices put together. Jesus declared that the scribe was not far from the kingdom of God. Also, in that chapter a group of Sadducees came to Jesus with a hypothetical situation. They describe a woman whose husband dies and leaves her with no children. By Jewish law a brother of the deceased husband would be required to marry the woman and have children on behalf of his brother. They ask Jesus, “What if there are six more brothers who all marry the woman and fail to have children? Whose wife is she in heaven?” Jesus responds by telling them essentially, “You don’t understand your Bible or how God works. God is not the God of the dead but of the living! You are greatly mistaken.”

Jesus’ teachings introduced an entirely new approach to God and understanding of God. He advocated a walk with God not directed by rules and regulations but by principles and values that Jesus showed us in how he lived his life on earth. The Jewish leaders of his day could not tolerate the challenge to their authority, so they had him crucified.

Soon after Jesus died, a follower of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus to place in a new tomb that he owned. He prepared the body of Jesus for burial, placed it in the tomb and had a stone rolled against the opening of the tomb. The next day the High Priests and Pharisees went to Pilate. The Message version of Matthew 27:63-66 records them saying, “Sir, we just remembered that that liar announced while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will be raised.’ We’ve got to get that tomb sealed until the third day. There’s a good chance that his disciples will come and steal the corpse and then go around saying, ‘He’s risen from the dead.’ Then we’ll be worse off than before, the final deceit surpassing the first.” Pilate told them “You will have a guard. Go ahead and secure it the best you can.” So, they went out and secured the tomb, sealing the stone and posting guards.”

At this point, a little historic information is helpful. The seal on the tomb was a string or rope tied across the face of the stone fastened on both sides of the opening to the tomb with wax or clay. Of course, the rope could easily be broken. However, the wax or clay was stamped with the official seal of Rome which was a sign that only the Roman government had the authority to open the tomb or break the seal. The guard was never a singular soldier. It was generally a minimum of four and up to sixteen soldiers who would take shifts guarding the tomb in pairs. If a guard fell asleep on the job, the punishment was death. If the seal of a tomb was broken, the entire group of guards could be put to death.

While Jesus' body was placed in the tomb and it was sealed and the guards took their places, Mary Magdalene and another Mary watched. The next morning there was an earthquake. An angel came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. The guards shook for fear, knowing that their lives were in danger. The angel spoke to the women telling them, "Don't be afraid. I know you seek Jesus. He is not here. He is risen. **Come and see** the place where he lay. Go quickly and tell his disciples. The NIV version says the women hurried away from the tomb **afraid yet filled with joy**. As they were on the road **Jesus met them**.

I think some of us come today with the same condition as the women. Our world looks far different than anything we imagined. We are afraid and also filled with joy. Jesus is alive and available to us today which brings us joy and we are also afraid. Jesus will meet us here in our fears. Jesus tells the women, "Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there **they will see me**."

Meanwhile, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the Chief Priests. They were Roman soldiers and should have reported to a military or government official. When the Chief Priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will bribe him and keep you out of trouble." So, they took the money and did as they were instructed. Matthew says, "And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day."

Before preparing this sermon, I had known of the conspiracy among the Jewish leadership and the Roman government to put Jesus to death. I had not paid attention to the conspiracy to cover up his resurrection. And I have never heard it mentioned in an Easter Sunday message. Perhaps it's our current events that drew my attention to this conspiracy. Political and religious powers conspiring together to retain wealth and power sounds like a familiar story. But the story is not over.

The book of Matthew ends with the disciples meeting Jesus in Galilee. Matthew reports that when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; **but some doubted**. Jesus gave the disciples instructions and then assured them, "**I am with you always, even to the end of the age**."

I want to repeat some of the phrases that stand out to me from Matthew's gospel.

- The angel at the tomb said, **Come and see**. On Easter and every day, we are invited to see Jesus. In acts of grace and mercy, kindness to friend and stranger alike, in love and concern for the orphan and widow, immigrant and enemy, or whoever the other may be to you, we see the love and concern of Jesus. We are invited to come and see what the kingdom of heaven looks like here and now in this time and place.
- The women leaving the tomb were **afraid yet filled with joy**. There is no shame if you are here today filled with fear. Our times are full of fearful events. Alongside the fear is also joy. There is joy that we are here together. There is joy in the beauty that still remains in

the world. New life is coming with spring and every day we can choose joy and gratitude in the midst of hard times.

- As the women hurried to meet the disciples, **Jesus met them.** In the days following Jesus' crucifixion, his followers experienced disappointment, agonizing loss, deep confusion, chaos of heart, mind, and soul. And Jesus met them. Jesus will meet us whatever our condition today.
- Jesus gave instructions for his followers to go to Galilee and promised **They will see me.** In his teachings, parables, and examples in flesh and blood Jesus gives us instruction. When we are faithful to the principals and values he taught and lived on earth, we can expect to see Jesus in ourselves and others.
- **They worshiped Him; But some doubted.** Jesus disciples were witnesses of the risen Christ and yet there remained some doubt. Faith is not the absence of doubt. Doubt is evidence that you are taking your faith seriously. Faith is choosing trust in the middle of doubt. We can all pray with the father who came to Jesus with a tormented child, "Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief."
- Jesus said **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.** Today we find ourselves in the middle of political and religious corruption, wars and rumors of wars, economic and environmental upheaval, and man's inhumanity to man. AND Jesus is with us. God is with us and in us. Quakers hold the truth that there is that of God in every person. All creation is infused with the imprint of the Divine.

Jesus is alive with us always, even to the end of the age. We can see Jesus today if we are willing to look. Happy Easter. Let us choose joy today.