

Sermon - Wonder, Disbelief, and Joy – 4-15-18

Grace and Peace...Pause and reflect...

Two weeks after Easter, we're very much like the early disciples, wondering about the things we've heard, and wrestling with the question, "What does all of this mean?" We're probably also wondering, deep in our hearts, "What could all of this mean in my life? Is this just a story from long ago, or does it mean something important to me? Could it change my life?"

Following my dad's death in February of 2005, I noticed something unusual; I started seeing people who looked like him almost everywhere I went. My dad was a big man, about 6'3 and 300 pounds with a grey fringe around his balding head and he wore glasses, with the bluest eyes I had ever seen. I seemed to find a number of men who fit that description following his death, either out shopping for the things for his funeral, in the airport on my trip back to San Diego, and in at least one of the doctors at Sharp Mesa Vista Hospital. It was a little eerie, but yet comforting at least after the first time when I was a little freaked out. As time went by so did my sightings of my dad, they became less and less. My process of grief allowed me to see my dad but it also let him go away too.

Luke tells us today in our gospel that the disciples were frightened and confused and filled with questions and wonder, and I think also grief. One commentator says that one portion of this text is one of the most engaging, hopeful, and beautiful lines of "all of Scripture" maybe you will too: New American Standard Bible: "While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement..."

Why does this verse hold such meaning? One commentator gave several reasons:

1). Wonder, disbelief, and joy. I have to imagine that one of these three words accurately describes just about anyone who walks through the doors of our church on Sunday mornings. Some come wondering what they may find, hoping for a word that makes sense not just to them, but of them. Some come for the sake of someone else, a spouse, parent, or friend, but have their own share of doubts and questions and probably wouldn't come on their own. And some come for the joy of being greeted by friends, meeting new people, being inspired by music, and hearing the promise of the Gospel which helps them face the week to come.

Wonder, disbelief, and joy, these words leave no one out!

2). Three words not only capture everyone, but they also encourage each one of us to be engaged in shared experiences of each word. Not only is no one is left out, but not one part of us is left out. We are invited to bring all of ourselves: our wonder and awe when we behold one of the amazing miracles in our lives – the Resurrection. We are invited to bring our disbelief, along with that our disappointment or anger, when something in life goes wrong and it doesn't feel like God is there. And we are invited to bring our joy when we are caught up in something larger than ourselves. When we experience something that moves beyond ordinary happiness or even delight to a whole-hearted joy over God's whole-hearted embrace of all of creation and that includes us.

3). We are reminded in this text that joy and disbelief, wonder and knowledge, courage and fear, confidence and insecurity – are not polar opposites but necessary conditions and involved of our experience of faith. Robust Christian faith isn't about embracing only one side of

the equation: joy, courage confidence, belief. Rather, robust Christian faith takes root in the tension of joy and disbelief existing side by side.

4). It's great that Jesus accommodates the people with whom he is speaking. They're afraid he's a ghost. He doesn't scold them or criticize them or tell them they shouldn't be reacting like they do. He doesn't even ask them why they're still struggling when he told them a number of times this would happen! "You think I'm a ghost. Let me eat something and reassure you." Jesus once again meets them – meets all of us – where we are in order to embrace our wonder, disbelief, and joy and gather us up into the marvelous, surprising, expectation-defying grace of God.

5). Jesus then commissions - commands them to be witnesses - even though they haven't really proven themselves to be particularly confident of what they are experiencing. It seems as if you don't have to have it all together to be a witness, it is something one does. Additionally, Jesus invites them to be witnesses to "of these things" or, "of all God's Divine Stuff." The wonder, the disbelief, the joy, the accommodation, the commission. And we can add in Jesus' teaching and compassion and ministry and healing. And dare we not forget Jesus' crucifixion and now his resurrection. Those hearing Jesus are witnesses to all this "Divine stuff." And witnesses have one job – to tell what is seen. To tell the truth, and to not worry about what happens afterward.

As I mentioned in my article in the digest, our witness is different than the witness of those who experienced my car accident on that one Saturday morning 8 years ago at the intersection of Texas and El Cajon in San Diego. I needed to ask two of the people seeing my

accident to be witnesses for me. It was something not easily agreed too, but both were willing – yet hesitant, especially when asked their personal information. But I had to ask them – I needed witnesses.

Jesus isn't asking those gathered if they will be witnesses to the Resurrection and the Gospel and the Love of God given to all people for the repentance and forgiveness of sins on the Cross – there is no request – there really isn't a demand either but there is a pronouncement of enlightenment: V.45 *"Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things."* Their minds were opened and they were enlightened! This may be our biggest challenge – allowing or preparing for an open mind so enlightenment may happen.

So this week maybe we can bring our whole selves – wonder, disbelief, joy, anger, expectations, hopes, disappointments, dreams, and more to the relationship we have with God and our witness of the meaning of the Resurrection in our daily lives. God isn't a Ghost who we see on occasion – God is shown in the simple and the complexity of life and the people around us. God gathers us all up, meet us where we are, and send us out to be witnesses, in our community, work and world. We are blessed to be blessings to others even in our Wonder, Disbelief, and Joy. Amen - Alleluia!