

Third Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

Year B RCL

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; Luke 24:36b-48

“You are witnesses of these things.”

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We continue hearing the passages of the resurrection since Easter Sunday and rightly so, because all our faith is based in Jesus' resurrection. As believers in Christ, the resurrection of Jesus represents the moment when history changes, recognizing Jesus' immortality. If we do not accept the resurrection, our faith has no reason to hope and consequently there is no Christian faith as Paul mentions in his first letter to the Corinthians 15:14, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

Christian tradition is clear in pointing out the passages that mention Jesus' resurrection to help the readers of the New Testament and believers of all time grasp and enjoy what the first disciples experienced. Even if some of these experiences like those for example taken from today's Gospel mentions that the disciples were startled, terrified, joyful, frightened, doubting, and

disbelieving. In reading the other passages of the resurrection from the New Testament, it is possible to confirm that these feelings, and reactions, along with many others express a pattern of human behavior in front of the Risen Lord.

This is important for us because it displays that in the first disciples, there is somehow a process of acceptance and comprehension of the new reality of Jesus as the Risen Lord living with them. A good example of this personal process of acceptance is found in the Gospel we heard on Easter Day: Peter arrives to the empty tomb and enters, and “He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, (John) who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.”

While the gospel of John never mentions Peter’s reaction, it is specific in saying, “the other disciple, (John) who reached the tomb first, also went in, (after Peter) and he saw and believed.” We cannot say whether Peter did or did not believe Jesus’ resurrection; we just observe that the reaction of each person in front of Jesus resurrection is different and requires a personal encounter with the Risen Lord. Like Mary of Magdalen also from the gospel on Easter Day, after hearing Jesus calling her by name, “Mary Magdalene went

and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." Take another example from last's week gospel of the way Thomas reacts when the other ten disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." Thomas in disbelief responds, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." In Thomas' case, he needs a personal visit from the Risen Lord, a personal call to see and touch so he can believe.

The amount of these narratives of Jesus' resurrection which total 12 episodes from the New Testament (including the Ascension), teach that the Lord appears to His followers while the tomb was empty. Jesus' resurrection, like all the actions of Jesus' life, requires receiving the testimonies of others and developing our own faith. If we neglect to make the transition from the New Testament to our own personal understanding (faith), the resurrection remains only a part of the story of Jesus, and we will not experience his eternal life with us here and now.

In today's gospel from Luke chapter 24, we hear the continuation of what happened on the road of Emmaus and how the disciples recognized Jesus as the Risen Lord in his action of breaking the bread for them. The gospel again is remarkably concise in saying that "Jesus himself stood among them." They

were startled and terrified to the point of assuming it was a ghost. Jesus then, not once but twice, shows them his hands and his feet to confirm for them that it is his same human body who suffered the crucifixion, and whose hands and feet were nailed to the cross, is now standing in front of them. It is Jesus' human body; the resurrection is real; the whole person of Jesus is risen; it is not only a spiritual appearance; Jesus is alive!

This testimony confirms what the other appearances of the Risen Lord have shown. Each appearance is a physical event, not a vision. In talking about his flesh and bones, the appearance confirms that it is Jesus, and he invites the disciples to see and touch him, a very real person. In asking for something to eat, he wants to demonstrate that his whole body is raised from death. This event happens in a conversation visit, it was not just a glimpse of time. This appearance like the other testimonies show that there is dynamism and movement.

The Risen Lord, after receiving and eating the fish in the presence of the disciples, begins to instruct them, and link his own death and resurrection to the biblical narrative of the Old Testament demonstrating that in him we find the fulfillment of the Scripture. "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" it is only in the presence of the Risen Lord that our minds

could be opened to understand the scripture. If we read the scripture only in our own understanding, our minds will continue to be closed; we need the Risen Lord to understand the scripture.

After opening the minds of the disciples, Jesus, the Risen Lord gives them a command that continues until now and is our responsibility: “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” The world is always in need of repentance and forgiveness, and Jesus’ directive becomes distinctive, and it characterizes those who believe in him throughout all history. The forgiveness of sins is another fruit of Jesus’ resurrection and a constant requisite for a truthful progress in the Christian life and in all human relationships.

Some people in the world find it difficult to understand and accept Jesus’ resurrection as a new and eternal life, especially those who have been dominated by the structures of death that force them to consider death as the only reality for humans. Many choose violence and oppression as the way to have control and power over others, and unfortunately for many, forgiveness is an unknown place.

Here is when we discover the countercultural value of the Gospel today. Jesus is not a ghost; the Risen Lord is eating with the disciples and he instructs them to proclaim repentance and forgiveness for the whole world. Then he adds: "You are witnesses of these things." The apostle Peter in talking with the Israelites, manifests the new life of Jesus working in him; the three times of denial is something of the past. Peter is bold to accuse them: "you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses." The capacity to give testimony for Peter, the disciples, and oneself, comes from the Risen Lord. Because we know that the world needs to hear of the new life of Jesus and experience his forgiveness, it is our obligation to give testimony of the Risen Lord who lives forever. Amen.