

A Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter    The Miracle of Resurrection  
April 18, 2021  
The Rev. Robin Teasley

*Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.*

*Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:36b-48*

This is the third of seven weeks of Eastertide. The gospel readings for these weeks help us understand that the Easter season isn't only about the astonishing miracle of the Resurrection, but also about the equally astonishing invitation for us to experience the Resurrection in our own lives and to become witnesses to its power to change the world.

A recurring theme in the resurrection appearance stories we have in the Gospels is the struggle of Christian communities to perceive and believe. Jesus returns, but only a few have eyes to see and even his disciples need help recognizing him. Jesus seems the same, and yet he's different. He vanishes into thin air, appears out of nowhere, and walks through locked doors, leading the disciples to think he is a ghost. Jesus addresses this directly when he says, "Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Jesus shows them his wounded hands and feet; he invites them to physically touch him so that they will recognize him as the one who was crucified, making evident that he is a physical body, not a spirit. Yet, even with this tangible evidence the disciples still doubt – in Luke's gospel it's not only Thomas who is struggling, and Jesus knows this. Jesus knows we struggle as well.

To the rational mind, Resurrection seems suspect, if not downright impossible. This impossibility, this difficulty in believing, is the place where we see that doubt is part of a life of faith. Luke's account does not neatly resolve the doubts expressed by the disciples. After Jesus invites them to look and see and touch, they do not suddenly rise above all doubt and believe. Instead, we get what may be one of the best verses in all of scripture: "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, Jesus said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'" The disciples are having a faith crisis and Jesus asks for a snack!

This is where the miracle of Resurrection becomes more visible, more accessible for me. It's as if Jesus is saying, this is all normal, have a snack, we'll work through this! Doubt and mystery will always be a part of faith, because settling into certainties is not an option for us as far as Jesus is concerned. He will appear among us to unsettle us and challenge us when we become fearful or complacent. He will appear among us and comfort us when we are suffering. And he will appear among us and equip us when we have work to do.

It has been a turbulent year of pandemic and racial tension and violence. Every day there is news of yet another unbelievable thing. Nothing seems certain anymore. We are alternately fearful and complacent, we are suffering, and we have work to do. There is no time like the present for the Church to witness to the power of the Resurrection.

We are witnesses because those first disciples were witnesses, and their testimony has been passed down through time. We offer our own testimony for others to witness as we continue the mission Jesus has entrusted to us. Feeding the hungry person right in front of us is a good starting place. Hunger can take other forms though. People are longing for acceptance, longing for someone to simply listen to their story, to offer a kind word or a smile.

Every one of us has been wounded in some way. The expression that wounded people wound people is all too true. This is why it is so necessary for us to name our own wounds and seek healing, and to help others bind up their wounds. Jesus healed people, and the Resurrection is the ultimate healing.

God raises up new life in so many ways. The resurrection of Jesus became the resurrection of the community of disciples, moving them from inward-focused fear to outward-focused witness and action. The disciples then went out to proclaim this mystery of faith, giving rise to countless resurrections of others. Resurrection is everywhere if we have eyes to see it. Even in a pandemic, even in suffering.

Where have you seen resurrection lately? Where do you long to see resurrection in your life?

To simply return to normal, which might not look as perfect as we thought, would be to miss the invitation to resurrection in our lives. As we begin to ease out of the pandemic, what do we want our post pandemic life to look like? What do we know to be more important than ever as a result of the suffering imposed on this world by the pandemic, and by the ways we wound one another out of our own woundedness and fear?

There is great pain, suffering, and violence in this world – enough to make us doubt in the power of the Resurrection. But when we doubt, when we are terrified, frightened, and disbelieving, we can return to that room where Jesus invited his disciples to touch him, to realize that it is the astonishing power of the Resurrection that will move us forward in joy and wonder. It will equip us to become witnesses today, right now, in ways that will bring healing and peace and justice; in ways that will bring near the kingdom of God. Amen.