

“Opening our Minds & Hearts to God’s Word”

+ 3 Easter B +

April 19, 2015

Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36-48

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN. The text is the Gospel for this day.

It has only been two weeks but already Easter seems far gone. I forewent Easter candy this year – trying to slim down even a little bit for our son’s wedding. There are some high end personalized *Peeps* on top of the entertainment center – bunnies dipped in chocolate with little bow-ties – not that I think about the candy I’m not eating. Yes, Easter seems distant to us, but not so in our text for today or in the church year. These 40 days between Easter and the Ascension were a most important time in the formation of the church – the last time on earth that Jesus would spend with His disciples giving them final instructions, opening their minds and hearts to the Scriptures so they could use the promises made and fulfilled to share the grave shattering/eternity changing truth that Christ was and is risen.

Sounds straightforward and simple but at the most this group with very little sleep in the last 96 hours had now had only 12 hours to get used to the idea that Jesus was risen from the dead and had conquered sin and death. I know 12 hours can be either an instant or an eternity, depending on what’s been going on and, truth be told, the disciples (minus Judas and Thomas) were still huddled in that same locked room still saying nothing to nobody outside of their group and who knows how much to each other. I have to imagine the silence shrouding that room was periodically punctuated by “do you really think it’s true?” “Who was that guy at the grave, anyway?” And “how did he know where Jesus was?” “When are we supposed to go to Galilee to see Jesus and will we be safe getting there?” “Are we supposed to find Him or is He going to find us?” And “if we see Him, will we recognize Him – Mary didn’t know Him until he said her name?” “Is He going to be angry that we all ran away?”

In this time before His appearance the disciples questioned their faith, too, just like we do. It’s just that the questions change depending on the circumstances. Rather abruptly Luke says, literally “Himself, stood among them.” I know that’s not what you heard read. The translations make it sound better and say, “Jesus, Himself.” And it’s no big deal, I guess. It is perfectly grammatically proper to insert a proper name when an intensive personal pronoun is

used. But I think that Luke had a reason for using that one pronoun that means “himself,” rather than just the name “Jesus.”

Writing as Luke did, at least a couple of decades after the resurrection, and not as an eye witness, but as an investigative reporter, Luke wanted to convince readers who, themselves, were not personal eyewitnesses that it was Jesus, himself, who was among the disciples in that room. And since the sight of a resurrected man is not what anybody would expect, Luke underscores that it was nobody else but Jesus in the flesh (albeit glorified flesh). It was not a phantom or a figment of the imagination. It was not a hallucination or wishful thinking. It was not a delusion of foggy minded, traumatized mourners. It was “Himself,” and no one else.

Then, even as now, people were inclined to believe that the big thing about Jesus was that He was a good man, a great teacher, a defender of the disenfranchised—all of which may be true. But the big thing – the eternity changing thing is: He died for our sins and rose from the dead. The body they put in the grave was raised alive and transformed into a new body, a body no longer hindered by things like locked doors, but still a body able to be recognized. And, sorry to disappoint those who want to ditch their glasses after the resurrection, lose their wrinkles or extra pounds, or grow their hair back, if Jesus’ resurrected body, complete with its scars is any clue, what you and I see in the mirror now, might be what we will see then. Only then, what we think of as “defects” won’t matter. That’s just my opinion, so don’t stress over it, we might all see the perfect image of ourselves we imagine – but even that won’t matter for we will be in the presence of Jesus and He will stay with us for eternity.

So “Himself” stands among them and says “Peace be with you.” Luke was quick to add that they were “startled and terrified,” but that’s not the full story behind “peace be with you.” Throughout the entire Old Testament, to look upon the face of God was a death sentence. Perfect holiness is lethal to the imperfect and unholy. If you had to face God, of course you would be startled and terrified. But in these after the resurrection appearances, Jesus always said, “peace be with you.” Peace—Shalom! It means everything is fine – it’s all for the good.

Shalom to terrified disciples means, “yes, it is me. Yes, I forgive you. Yes, just as I told you, the power of death is broken.” That’s why we say it so often to one another during worship. It’s not just a churchy way to say “hello.” It is our shared reassurance that because Jesus lives,

our lives, no matter how many bumps in the road are going to be ok, everything is fine, our lives will turn out all for the Good.

That night those who gathered saw and touched Jesus – knew that He was truly among them and wanted Him to stay. When we gather in worship we do the same thing: We see Him. We touch Him. Whenever we gather at His table; whenever we share His Word, Jesus comes among us and His presence brings His peace and sends us forth with purpose.

Jesus explained and opened their minds to the Scriptures that laid out the game plan centuries before it unfolded in Jerusalem. He promised them the Holy Spirit – the gift that would enable Jesus to live in their hearts and ours each day – that would help them to understand the Scripture and explain the Good News to others – all ours by faith and in baptism.

Imagine the gift we have been given – faith, life, community, God’s Word and Sacrament to gather around. Think of the Word! In one book, over thousands of years, with different authors, one single story was told to bring Good News to all people of all nations – news of salvation, hope, peace, joy – consolation and community on this earth and Jesus with us forever in heaven. That’s what Bible study is all about---in some way, every last detail, carries and completes the story of Jesus who will never leave us or forsake us.

Outside of the church, history is a timeline with events lined up from the first until whatever turns out to be the last. For Christians, history is a completed circle. It is, literally, “his –story.” And our task – like the task of the first disciples is to be witnesses to Jesus. “We (too) are witnesses.”

That one word that strikes terror in the heart of many Christians –witness! What if I get it wrong? What if somebody asks me a question I can’t answer? What if I can’t get pastor on the cell phone so I can hand over a hot prospect and let him make the deal? Witness! That must be a job for professionals!

By the command and power of Jesus the Christ, we are all professionals. We profess—that’s a Latin word (profiteor) and it means to declare publicly what we have come to know is true. By faith - by the gift and power of the Holy Spirit we profess Jesus. It does not mean we

have all the answers. It does not mean our lives are all squared away. It simply means that Jesus has come among us with His peace and graced us with His gifts and given us “His – story” to share. That is our story to share while we still have time. Amen.

Now may our holy and righteous God, the author of our lives and our adoptive Father, fills us with His words of life and go with us to share the news that Christ is risen! (He is risen, indeed!)