

**Easter 3B – April 26, 2009**

*Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ*

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Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

I John 3:1-7

***Luke 24:36b-48***

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It's been two short weeks since we peered into the tomb and found it empty.

Our focus may be beginning to slip, to shift to other things now that Easter is in the rear-view mirror and the flames of Pentecost have yet to be kindled. But in our text this morning we meet the risen Jesus once again.

You know the story.

The disciples are gathered together, doing who knows what, trying to figure out what is to happen next – and Jesus comes to them and stands among them and says, “Peace be with you. Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in you hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, and see that it is I myself. Touch me and see. 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. 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.”

*You are witnesses of these things.*

What does it mean to be a witness? We assume we know what a witness is, right? A witness is:

- Someone who has seen an event
- one who can give factual, credible information about some happening
- one who can testify as to what has taken place

It's plain and simple. That's what a witness is.

We are eager, ready and willing to say that the disciples were witnesses – eyewitnesses, if you will. They were there. They may not have had it all together all of the time, they may not have always understood, but they were there – and they saw it all. They were there for the healings, the parables, the miracles, and they were there that day when Jesus came and stood among them and said “Peace be with you” as he showed them His hands and His feet.

The disciples were witnesses.

As a people of faith, we consider ourselves to be witnesses as well. But we have a problem. How is it that we can be witnesses *of*, or *for*, or *to* something that we've never seen for ourselves? We weren't there. And if being there like the disciples is the only criteria, we've obviously missed the boat by about 20 centuries and we might as well just go home.

In the gospel sense of being a witness, though, we believe that the "there" continues to be present to us, among us and with us "here." The risen Christ meets us and stands among us here today – amid all our doubts, confusions and hesitations, in all our successes, triumphs and rejoicings, and in all our powerlessness, weakness and finitude. The risen Lord stands among us, offers a word of peace and says, “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.”

*You are witnesses of these things.*

In my home church in Virginia, we used to sing a song called “Jesus My Lord.” The verses went through a litany of ways in which we could or might see and know Jesus for ourselves. But the song, the chorus, ended like this:

Have you ever stood at the table,

with the Lord there in your midst?

Seen the face of Christ on each other?

Then I say ... you've seen Jesus my Lord.

Have you seen Jesus my Lord?

He's here in plain view.

Take a look, open your eyes.

He'll show it to you.

*You are witnesses of these things.*

Theologian Frederick Buechner once wrote:

Just as Jesus appeared at His birth as a helpless child that the world was free to care for or destroy, so now he appears in His resurrection as the pauper, the prisoner, the stranger, the one who on His hands and feet still bears the marks of finitude and human suffering. He appears in every form of human need that the world is free to serve or to ignore. The risen Christ is Christ risen in His glory and enthroned in all this glorious canvas, stained glass and architecture as Redeemer and Judge. But he is also Christ risen in the shabby hearts of those who, although they have never touched the mark of the nails, have been themselves so touched by Him that they believe anyway. However faded and threadbare, what they have seen of Him is at least enough to get their bearings by.<sup>1</sup>

That is, I would venture to say, at least part of what has lead each of us here today, to this place. We have all met Him and witnessed His presence among us, and with us:

- ❖ in the eyes of a new-born child
- ❖ in the embrace from a friend

- ❖ in worship and in prayer
- ❖ in the person not like us
- ❖ at covered dish suppers and in soup kitchens
- ❖ in the straw of the manger
- ❖ in the offensiveness of the cross
- ❖ in the shock of the empty tomb
- ❖ here, at the table, as we drink the wine and eat the bread of Holy

### Communion

We are witnesses of this Risen Lord. We have beheld His hands and His feet, His presence with us.

As we live and move in the tension between being witnesses and bearing witness, between the already of Easter and the not yet of Pentecost, we know, experience and believe that in every age there rises again the need to tell the story of our life – what has happened to us in our community, how we came to believe, how we reason about things and what we see from our point of view. To bear witness to the Risen Lord who meets us again and again, showing us His hands and His feet, and who speaks to us and to the world a word of resurrection hope.<sup>2</sup>

As witnesses of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, we are entrusted with the message of the Gospel. In today's Gospel reading Jesus said to the disciples, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" The disciples were still struggling to understand the presence of Jesus in their midst. It was only when Jesus ate in their midst that they could understand how the words of Moses were fulfilled.

The resurrection is one of those mysteries for which Christians are stewards. More than two thousand years later it is still difficult to understand. In Jesus' presence, would you have responded any differently than the disciples? Yet sometimes it is the simple things like eating a piece of food that makes our faith seem believable and real.<sup>3</sup>

As we conclude our annual Offering of Gifts today, it is these simple things you are asked to share with others. Simple things like:

- ❖ cooking for or serving at Faith Kitchen
- ❖ serving as a worship assistant
- ❖ sharing your gifts of music or the arts
- ❖ serving the congregation on a committee
- ❖ helping teach our church's future generations

Where the Lord's physical hands and feet are no longer present, the ministry of the hands of countless saints in simple and sincere ministries continues to bear witness to the Lord's living presence. Although he may not appear in our midst to eat broiled fish, His presence is tangible in soup kitchens, are the kitchen table, and around the altar table. We see Him "in the breaking of the bread." As in the first century so now the most convincing proof of the resurrection is the daily testimony of the faithful that the Christ still lives and the work of His kingdom continues.<sup>4</sup>

Today you are being asked to share your gifts with others so that as you are a witness to these things, they, too, might become a witness. That for others, faith might become believable and real. That through you, others may come to know the Risen Lord that you already witness.

Amen.

[1,393 words]

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 100.

<sup>2</sup> This sermon to this point owes a great debt to John E. Alsup, "An Exegetical Study of the Common Lectionary: Luke 24:36b-48" at <http://home.netcom.com/~jealsup/b2216.html>, downloaded 4/25/09.

<sup>3</sup> The preceding two paragraphs are inspired by Keith Mundy, "Sermon Starters: April 26, 2009" from [http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Discipleship/Stewardship/stewardshipnow\\_sermonstarters.aspx#4](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Discipleship/Stewardship/stewardshipnow_sermonstarters.aspx#4), downloaded 4/25/09.

<sup>4</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *New Interpreters' Bible*, Vol. IX: Luke, John (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 490.