

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Eastertide
April 18, 2021 Year B
St. Michael's Episcopal Church
The Reverend Canon Michael J. Horvath
Gospel: Luke 24:36b-48

Don't you think it would have been cool to be a fly on the wall when Jesus visited Mary and Martha, or when Jesus raised Lazarus from the tomb? Feeding of the 5000 would be pretty amazing, too, I think.

But today's Gospel is not a bad place to be in either. Here, in Luke's gospel, Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures. Earlier that day he revealed the universe of knowledge to the disciples on the road to Emmaus when Jesus "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures."

All of this is revealed to his disciples so they would understand that Jesus's work here on earth, his death and resurrection, is a continuation of God's salvation plan within our human context that has been in the works from the beginning. It is a continuation of God's love unfolding in the here and now, not some better or replacement religion.

Jesus tells the disciples "you are witnesses of these things", they are fully initiated into their story, not just one passed down from generation to generation. They are witnesses to God's history with Israel, all they've seen and heard as they traveled with Jesus, and now they are witnesses to what leaves them both disbelieving and joyful, the risen Messiah, who comes to them once again in flesh and blood, yet this time with the scars and wounds of crucifixion.

It is our story too. We are witnesses not only to the resurrection but also to everything that's written in Scripture because God constantly seeks to break through into this time and place and He does that through our lives, present and past. Through our baptism, the Spirit makes us part of the overarching story of Scripture, God's love affair with God's people.

We know, or we should know, these stories, these events that name the times and ways God has brought salvation to His people – and water lies at the heart of it; God saving Noah and his family from the flood; God parting the sea for the Israelites to escape the Egyptians; God leading the Israelites across the Jordan to the promised land. In the Gospels we hear God speak at Jesus' baptism; Jesus gives the Samaritan woman at the well living water. God's salvation in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, flows through these baptismal waters in this font and into the lives of all who are baptized here, into all of our lives as we live out our faith in daily life. I could not wait to asperge the congregation with water on Easter Sunday, because we must remember, we must be called back to and journey through life with our head wet, marked with the cross of Christ. Which brings me back to the place where Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to the Scriptures.

As is true many times in the Gospels, the Greek word used by the author gives real depth to what we are reading. The Greek word for “opened” contains the root of the word for “mind,” so this could be interpreted, loosely, as Jesus “mind-opened the minds” of the disciples. In other words, Jesus’s sharing of the story with the disciples was mind-blowing! The times something we read in Scripture or an image we hear in preaching or in a bible study so surprises and shocks us, is so unexpectedly wonderful that we’re awed beyond understanding? This is the way I feel about the Resurrection - how does one preach on this mystery or mysteries that defies reason and stretches the boundaries of my faith to a place we can’t see, but that our hearts desire, a place we can only continue to journey towards as the Spirit leads.

Being a witness to God’s Living Word is part of your DNA as a baptized child of God. And being a living witness to God’s Logos – Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word – calls us to be that Living Word as well. It’s all very well and good to read about Jesus and his miracles. It is all very well and good to celebrate the stories that are forever memorialized in text. It’s all very well and good to have heard these amazing stories as you were growing up in Sunday School. But a child’s understanding of Jesus remains child-like. As adults, we need to face the fact that the life of Jesus was extremely difficult. Everything he stood for – caring for those on the margins, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, forgiving the unforgiveable, loving the unlovable – requires us to have more than a child-like understanding of Jesus and Christian faith. It requires more than knowing Jesus on a Sunday school level, it requires living as Jesus. Anyone can read the Gospels, but it requires deep faith to live the Good News.

It takes a fully formed sense of discipleship, of following in the footsteps of Jesus, to confront the pandemic of gun violence that seems to grip our nation. It takes putting on Jesus’s mantle to confront the history of systemic racism that still plays out in our society. It takes calling ourselves into the light of God’s truth to condemn the fact that in a nation of plenty, so many go hungry and unsheltered. And it’s not about political parties or extremism, it’s about living the life that Jesus calls us to live, and being the disciple that Jesus has taught us to be. It’s about living out what our DNA has hard-wired us to do.

That is the only way the Good News, the very thing we live for as Christians, can be shared. The physical Jesus is long gone, but the Eternal Truth lives in each one of us. It’s time to pass that one. Amen.