



Sermon for The Third Sunday of Easter

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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Acts 3: 12-19

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24: 36b-48

Psalm 4

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work. Amen

Our collect for today offers a concise encapsulation of our scriptures. Open our eyes of faith that we may behold Jesus in all his redeeming work.

I love the Easter season where we get to experience the scriptures of Jesus' appearances to his disciples after his resurrection. The astonishment, awe and wonder unfolding in each appearance as the disciples slowly recognize what has happened. The dread of what occurred transforming into jubilation and joy.

Our scripture today from Acts is one of joy. We read at the very end of Luke, just after our gospel reading today, that Jesus took the disciples out to Bethany, and while he was blessing them, he was lifted into heaven. The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

In in our reading from Acts, Peter and John were heading to the temple, and came across a man who had been lame from birth begging for alms at the Beautiful Gate leading into the temple. Peter called upon Jesus to heal the man. As this man was walking and praising God, those around him were filled with amazement and wonder.

Our reading starts where Peter is addressing these astonished people. Peter is clear to point out that it isn't by his or John's power this healing took place, but faith in Jesus' name that made this man strong. His faith, that is through Jesus has given him the health those in the temple now saw.

The words Peter says in this scripture has raised all kinds of issues throughout history and is perceived to be filled with accusations for the Israelites handing Jesus over to be crucified. But as you read on, you see that Peter is not accusing, but calling these bystanders and observers friends who acted in ignorance. He uses the opportunity to tell the Good News. This was all necessary as this was the way God fulfilled what he had foretold through Moses and the prophets.

Peter then calls on them to repent – which in its original Greek, metanoia, means to change one's mind for the better. Peter is exhorting them to turn to God so that their sins may be wiped out.

In John's letter, we are told that through Jesus' death and resurrection, through this love the Father has given us, we can now be called children of God. While not all has been revealed, we do know that he takes away sins and in him there is no sin. When he is fully revealed, we do know we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. This hope in him purifies us, just as he is pure.

Our passage in Luke follows the story of the disciples who had unknowingly met Jesus as they traveled to the town of Emmaus. It wasn't until these disciples broke bread with him that they recognized this was in fact Jesus. They too experienced the awe and wonder as they proclaimed, "weren't our heart not burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" They got up and hurriedly returned to Jerusalem – a seven-mile trek over extremely hilly terrain – finding the other disciples and companions gathered in a room.

As they were talking about their experiences on the road, and how Jesus had also appeared to Simon Peter, Jesus joins them in the room. "Peace be with you," he invokes, a common greeting to his disciples as we read in other places in Luke and in John, perhaps to help appease their terror.

Jesus then goes on to assuage their fears of him being a ghost, or somehow not real. He shows the scars, the nail holes and asks them to touch him, as a ghost doesn't have a corporeal body. He then asks for and eats food – again, a ghost wouldn't eat. As the disciples slowly turn from disbelief and fear, to joy, Jesus reminds them of what he had been saying all along. That everything written about him in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.

And, again to this larger gathering, as he had done for the disciples walking with him on the road to Emmaus, he opened their minds to understand the scriptures -- that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day – and we next hear Luke's version of Jesus' great commission – that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in *his* name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And he tells them, *you* are witnesses of these things.

Oh, what I wouldn't give to have been in "The Room Where It Happened!" To have my mind opened to fully understand the scriptures foretelling the story of Jesus and his great gift to us all.

Christ's resurrection is both in body and in spirit and is transformed by the power of the Spirit to be beyond our earthly limitations. The resurrection starts on earth with Jesus dead and buried and ends up in God with Jesus the Living One transformed by the power of the Spirit. He didn't leave us.

We all want resurrection, and if we open our eyes, we can behold Jesus in all his redeeming work. If we open our eyes, we will see that resurrection is around us all the time. It is not an event that occurred a long time ago, but it is the way of our world from the beginning to the end. From metamorphosis, such as a caterpillar changing to a butterfly, condensation as water turns to steam, evaporation as water dissipates, our ever-changing seasons, to the galaxies with stars dying and being born with great explosion, we live resurrection and see it every day. Every time we love someone who isn't necessarily loving to us, every time we begin anew, even after repeated failures; when we refuse to be cynical, negative or hopeless, we experience the Risen Christ.

We can hone our spiritual side. Just as we run drills in sports, rehearse with a musical instrument, or practice what we have learned in therapy, we can develop our spiritual practices. We must find ways to invite transformation into our lives. One way I have been practicing lately is to consciously find moments of awe even in the most mundane tasks of day-to-day life. Chopping vegetables and cooking dinner can become an exercise in gratitude for good fresh food. Walking the dog can change from a chore to moments of exploration and joy as my puppy wags her tail and sniffs her way around the block. Going to work yet again, is an opportunity to thank God for the continued abundance in my life.

As Ilia Delio, a Franciscan sister and theologian specializing in science and religion, writes, “Where is the risen Christ? Everywhere and all around us! ... We have an invitation to go to church in a new way, by praying before the new leaves budding through dormant trees or the wobbly flowers by the side of the road pushing through the solid earth.... [Like Francis of Assisi,] we too can sing with the air we breathe, the sun that shines upon us, the rain that pours down to water the earth. And we can cry with those who are mourning, with the forgotten, with those who are suffering from disease or illness, with the weak, with the imprisoned. We can mourn in the solidarity of compassion, but we must live in the hope of new life. For we are Easter people, and we are called to celebrate the whole earth as the body of Christ. Every act done in love gives glory to God: a pause of thanksgiving, a laugh, a gaze at the sun, or just raising a toast to your friends at your virtual gathering. The good news? “He is not here, for he is risen!” Christ is everywhere, and the love that he has taught us will make us whole.”

Resources:

- Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 102–103.
- Richard Rohr – a variety of daily meditations
- Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 195–196.
- Sherri Brown, Assoc. Professor of New Testament, Creighton University.