

So here we are, two weeks after Easter, and most of us are probably pretty surprised that even though we may no longer be celebrating the DAY we are, with the rest of the Church still celebrating Easter.

It feels like every year Easter puts us on information overload. We get all this spiritual and emotional information crammed into one week. Palm Sunday, Maunday Thursday, Good Friday, Easter...it sometimes feels like the whole ministry and meaning of Jesus is shoved into these four days and once Easter day is done we are left in some sort of lily-infused, sugar- induced crash. It does not matter what we have been told or experienced prior to THE DAY all we know is that right now we are left at the threshold of an empty Tomb and much like the earliest disciples we are wondering about the things we've heard, the things we've seen and we are wrestling with questions, "What does all of this mean? "What could all of this mean in my life? Is this just a story from long ago, or does it mean something important to me? Could it profoundly change my life? What's Next?"

In our scripture today we find disciples who are frightened and confused and filled with questions. They are confronted head on with their doubts and disbelief .

This week's passage speaks of an offer of peace, a request for food, a blessing and a commissioning; What the story describes is the very earliest Christians hearing and doing the very same things that 21st century Christians do: journeying, questioning, fearing, but also feeding and being fed, listening for and receiving God's call.

Luke 24:36-48

³⁶ While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ³⁷ They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts?" ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." ⁴⁰ As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of baked fish. ⁴³ Taking it, he ate it in front of them.

⁴⁴ Jesus 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 from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. ⁴⁶ He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ Look, I’m sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power.”

Will you pray with me please? May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight Oh Lord. Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!

So now what? While we have moved on from Easter, our scripture is still firmly planted in the immediate aftermath of the resurrection. But instead of sharing the joyous news of a risen Jesus we are huddled with the disciples behind locked doors. Why are the doors locked? Because the disciples are afraid that with Jesus gone the authorities will now come after them. Everything that Jesus has ever taught them has gone out the

window and accusations and finger pointing are the name of the game. There is chaos and there is confusion...everything was going so well and now this! The followers of Jesus are immersed in a jumble of fear, frustration, guilt, grief, doubt, anxiety, suspicion, distrust, restlessness, despondency and terror. Their leader was dead and his bloody wounded body was missing. In the midst of this escalating alarm, out of nowhere, Jesus suddenly appears. "Peace be with you..." The storm is calmed...Jesus is there opening their minds, and in doing so, sets them free from their fears and sets the stage for the next big thing. The door has been opened for transformation but it remains to be seen if they or we will walk into the new life of the transformed.

There is something about this time after Resurrection Day that I find fascinating both then and now. Then, the sight of the empty tomb is not met with joy and celebration but with fear and terror, now the promise of the empty tomb is met with joy and celebration but when we are encouraged to share that joy with others we often react with something like fear and terror. In

both cases, that empty tomb, and the prospect of a risen Jesus evokes concern. Why is that? Let's go back and look at what was going on just before our reading today.

In the days following Jesus' arrest and death, the lives of his followers were spinning out of control, everyone had basically gone into hiding and their emotions were on edge. When Jesus appears among them they are "startled and terrified". They think they are seeing a ghost. Earlier the women had come back hysterical, talking about the empty tomb. Perhaps they didn't fully believe, and they knew they didn't fully understand, that Jesus had risen. There were reports that believers on the road to Emmaus have had an encounter with the risen Jesus, but no one in that room had seen him and tempers are running high and fear is running amok and no one was ready when Jesus suddenly materialized.

Fear is a natural human response, and in today's lesson Jesus responds to their fear in two ways. His first words are calming...Peace be with you...he understands the fear, but the second thing out of his mouth is a challenge..."Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" Jesus

meets the disciples where they are, he lets them know that he understands the fear of their hearts, by inviting them to touch him, by seeing him eat some food he encourages them to move beyond where they are, beyond what they think they know, beyond what feels comfortable and he invites them to move into a new life. Their fear turns to joy, but they are still having a hard time leaving their doubts behind and they are still wondering what it all means.

We may have the benefit of a couple of thousands of year's hind sight, but I think we can still relate to what the early disciples are going through. I think we all find that there are many times that we can't always relate to a risen Jesus, the fears in our life sometimes stand in the way of our ability to see Christ among us, to see Christ in front of us. To see Christ with us.

We all have fear and anxiety in our lives. Our fear may be very personal, the fear of illness, of losing our job, not finding a job, changing jobs. We have fears of loneliness or loss, fears of saying the wrong thing, or not doing the right thing. Fear of things that happened in our past and fear of what might happen in the future. We fear for our children, for the pain they may

experience in the world. We experience fear when we are faced with change, anxiety of the unknown brings out some of our deepest fears. Maybe the thing that we fear most of all is death, our own, or that of a loved one. When so many fears hold us in such a tight grip, it becomes difficult for us to witness to the joy of this Easter season...fear has been defeated, death has been defeated because it could not hold on to Jesus and Jesus is alive! Christ is among us!

The early disciples could not know it yet, but we know it now. The power of the resurrection is the power to calm the storms, the power to plant the seeds of transformation. The hope of the resurrection is grounded in the experience of those first followers. Closed minds can be opened and our lives can be changed. The joy of the resurrection is that we can now change the lives of others because our fears are overthrown and we are transformed into a new life in Christ.

A new life in Christ! What a gift! But this gets back to my earlier feelings of uneasiness about Easter. We have no problem proclaiming the good news of a risen Christ, we fully accept that gift of salvation and eternal life but I think that over and over

again, year after year we miss the mark and we miss the mark because our fears get in the way.

What are we missing? We are missing the fact that this good news is not for us! It's not for us because we know, we believe it, and we get it. From the birth to the death it's all about God. Our love for God and God's love for us but that is only half of the story. What we are missing is the answer to the question I asked two weeks ago. Now What? Now what do we do? How do we as a church and people of the Church live out the good news that Christ is among us? Oh sure, on a personal level it calls us in to a new way of living but if we think it is all about us than we are missing the point. The "now what" is right here in today's scripture lesson, it is on the lips of Jesus time and again. Witness. Tell the good news, show the good news, and don't let someone else tell this story for you. "YOU are witnesses of these things."

Christ is among us, finding us through our fear, through our locked doors and offering us transformation for our lives. Jesus is alive and it is up to us to be a witness to that.

It is very easy to stand at the mouth of the empty tomb praising God for the miracle of the resurrection, but the time has come. The time has come to step away from the tomb....there's nothing to see here! The challenge for us as 21st century Christians is to move away from that 1st century tomb. The time has come to witness with our words and with our actions. The time has come to stop saying "No" and start saying "Yes". The time has come to live with Christ among us. The time has come to move away from the things that feel secure and safe and start taking the risk of witnessing to a risen Christ.

Over the upcoming weeks of the Easter season we are going to hear about some of the early witness of the church and continue to look for the answers to the challenge that Jesus has issued...

Where is the presence of the risen Christ needed? What kinds of experience and understanding do we need to that we can be credible and incredible witnesses to God's love in this world? How do we participate in God's work on this earth?

No matter how we answer these questions, Jesus commissions us to declare the presence and the power of God in the midst of our fears. The risen Christ makes himself known to us in so

many ways. As people of faith, we are to be witnesses to Christ among us, in our words and in our deeds; the power of the resurrection demands nothing less. Hallelujah, Amen