

*Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York*  
*Lutheran Church of the Epiphany ~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía*  
*Hempstead, New York*  
*Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor*

*Third Sunday of Easter B – April 18, 2021*  
*Acts 3:1-19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3:1-17, Luke 24:36b-48*

*Christ is risen, Alleluia! C: **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!***

We have traveled during this Easter season, through the differing resurrection accounts of Mark's and John's gospels; and now we are in Luke's, so some context for today's lesson might be helpful. It was the Sunday after the Friday crucifixion. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, "and the other women with them" had gone to the tomb at dawn that morning with spices to anoint Jesus' body. Upon arriving, they were perplexed to find the stone rolled away from the tomb and Jesus' body was not there. Then two men in dazzling clothes appeared and asked them why they were seeking the living among the dead. They told the women that, as Jesus had told them, he'd risen on the third day and would meet them in Galilee.

The women were terrified, but recalled Jesus' words, and went to the apostles' room to tell them what had happened. The men didn't believe them, but Peter ran to the tomb, found it empty and went home amazed. (Luke 24: 1-12.)

The same day, two disciples were walking to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. They met a stranger on the road, who began to walk with them. He asked what they were talking about – it was Jesus' crucifixion – and what the women had reported and what Peter had seen. Then the stranger interpreted the things about Jesus in the law, in the prophets and in all the scriptures. When they reached Emmaus, the stranger was going to travel on, but the disciples invited him to stay with them, since it was evening. The three sat down to eat and the stranger took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to the others. Immediately, they recognized him as Jesus, and then – he vanished. The two immediately returned to the gathered apostles and told them what had happened. (Luke 24:13-35.)

It is at this point in this very long day that our lesson begins, and suddenly, Jesus is in the midst of the gathered apostles in their room and he speaks: "Peace be with you." (Luke 24:36.)

They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “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. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. (24:37-43.)

So it was upon their extension of hospitality to an apparent stranger that the two disciples were able to recognize Jesus. And he was going to eat a meal with them. But he vanished as soon as their eyes were opened. What a curious combination of humanity and mystery.

And later, in the upper room, it was their Jesus, with wounded hands and feet (we assume they were wounded, although the text doesn't specify their condition) who was among them, but he had gotten through the walls without coming through the door. It's no wonder that they were joyful, yet disbelieving and wondering. We probably would have the same reaction. And he showed them in another way that he was alive: he ate some fish in their presence. Again, this was the Son of God, fully human and fully divine.

This was not a ghost or a resuscitated cadaver. This was their resurrected Master, their Rabbi, their Lord. Then the whole group had their minds opened to the fulfillment of the scriptures and gave them their mission:

“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.”

And we have inherited this mission, despite our not having been in that upper room. We use this word, *witness*, in several ways: to identify the person who has seen something; and to identify the person who can describe what she has seen; the action of giving that description and the description itself. We have received the witness of Jesus' resurrection from generations of witnesses: our forebears in the faith.

We are called to live as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, and of the forgiveness of sins. How do you carry out that mission – to witness to Jesus' resurrection on a daily basis? How do you live, showing that you believe that God forgives sin? Are you full of hope at the action of God's grace in your life, or are you despairing of the condition of the world?

We are called to live as children of God, because God has loved us that much, to make us God's children (1 John 3:1). How do you carry out your inheritance of God's parental love in you, from day to day? Are your words and actions motivated by joy in God's acceptance, or do you bring gloom to your world, your family, friends, co-workers?

We are called to live in faith in the name of Jesus, which has the power to heal and make whole (Acts 3:16). How do you show your faith in Jesus through your relationships with people you know, and with people who you're just meeting for the first time? Will people know you by your faith in the name of Jesus, the faith that achieves miraculous outcomes?

We have had a very difficult year, with restrictions on our ability to come and go freely; with threats to our health from COVID-19; with demands that we learn to function in new ways with unfamiliar technology. We have, in some cases, had to be able to live solitary lives. But these changes to our lives have been for our health and that of – the whole world. We hear that these changes in our usual routines can bring depression. But, if we are full of joy in God's love and buoyed up by hope for God's forgiveness, we will be able to not only survive, but to thrive.

Let's pray: God, our Father, Jesus, our Brother, open us up to your love, your grace, your call to use us in your world. Fill us with joy and hope. Help us to dispel despair and gloom so that we can be of service to those around us, every day, in new and exciting ways. In the name of the Father, and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. C: Amen.