

Acts 3: 12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3: 1-7; Luke 24: 36-48



This is the Third Sunday in Easter. This is the third Gospel in those three weeks from which we are reading:

Easter Day was Mark (16: 1-8)

Last week, the Second Sunday in Easter was from John (20:19-31)

And today our Gospel reading is from Luke (Luke 24: 36b-48).

If, as a church that follows the Revised Common Lectionary, one feature of which is the Gospel of Matthew in Year A, the Gospel of Mark in Year B and the Gospel of Luke in Year C, you might be feeling a bit of “what’s with all this change between the gospels?” And yet, the Gospel message is the same by and large no matter which of the four gospels we are reading on a particular Sunday. The Gospels are, by definition, the good news of Jesus the Christ. The good news that God is active in our world, even today; that Jesus shows us a way to live and behave that is faithful to the commandments to love God and love neighbor.

Yes, in all three Jesus was crucified and was buried. And yes, in all three, Jesus has risen and now appears to one or more of his disciples. The overarching message of Jesus is “peace”. “Do not be afraid.” “I am with you” even as Jesus is changed into a form that at first the disciples thought was a ghost. And, because ghosts do not need nourishment, Jesus eats with them in today’s reading.

There’s a cute cartoon that I’ve included on the copy of this sermon that will be posted on our website. It’s from “Angus Dei”, translated as lamb of God.¹ The two characters are Rick and Ted, sheep who discuss the week’s lectionary readings. This week Ted asks Rick: “Jesus just shows up and asks for something to eat?” and Rick replies: “Yeah it’s great. He’s no ghost! It’s really him, body and all.” To which Ted says: “Still – you think he’d call first.”

Sometimes we really do want Jesus to call first, so we can prepare ourselves for an encounter with the risen Lord. We want to metaphorically pick up the house, dust, set out our best china and silver and dress in nice clothes. We don’t want Jesus to see us as we really are- somewhat tired and bedraggled with our life in a mess and our emotions pretty close to the surface.

Well, the disciples’ emotions are all over the place: startled, terrified, frightened, doubts, joy disbelieving, wondering. And so Jesus eating a piece of fish serves to settle them down so they can hear his message, so that their minds could be opened to understanding the scriptures.

¹ <https://www.agnusday.org/> (April 9, 2018)

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Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Were it not for this sending by Jesus of the disciples in a post-resurrection appearance, we would likely not know of Jesus except possibly as a footnote in history. Go. Go in peace.

We follow this part of the command each week at our dismissal: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. It is not enough – although it is important- that we gather here each week. If we stay within these walls we have a nice social club but we are not spreading the Gospel of God's love for each and every one of us throughout the world.

One of the hymns we sing periodically has the refrain “and they will know we are Christians by our love.” This is, as you know, the kind of love that cares for neighbor and the poor or the outcast and cares for any who needs a helping hand. A helping hand, though, that empowers growth and development. Not assistance that keeps the one in need in a place of begging or a place where an attitude of entitlement develops. This is not easy for us.

As we develop ourselves as Christians following Jesus, take a look at your own heart and your own emotions. What keeps you from being a disciple sent to spread the good news of God in Christ Jesus?

An article in *The Weeder's Reader* (Special Issue) entitled “My New Year's Garden” may be helpful. I know there are many gardeners in this parish and this is the time of year here in Indiana when we are getting our gardens ready for planting.

“As we grow older, New Year's Resolutions are apt to become more important to us. The accumulating years begin to press down upon us, bringing acute awareness of our mortality. So we reflect on the previous year's disappointments, consider those things that we have put off, and contemplate new possibilities – especially if we're gardeners. Indeed, once the Christmas decorations have been stored away and the seed catalogs start to arrive, I find myself starting to ponder...

I planted too much anger and resentment last year, so this year I will replace them with some tolerance and patience. I really could have used some more enthusiasm, too, so I will add a little extra this time and plant it next to the hope. I have always wanted to cultivate laughter, and I have the perfect spot right next to the lighthearted expressions.

Perhaps I should thin out the tears. I really don't need very many of those. And, you know, I never really liked the frustration – it's so invasive. I think I will replace it with harmony. I didn't care for that variety of judgment, either. It's casting a shadow over the kindness. It does complement the blame, but the other plants that are near it are not doing well. I will move them both to that far corner and be sure to keep them pruned back. I should probably move the criticism back there, as well.

A person could never have too much peace, so I will order twice as much this year. I will add a couple more varieties of love and put them right here in the front, so that I can smell their fragrance whenever I walk past them.

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There. Now I can place my orders. This catalog says that if I place an order for \$20 or more, they will send me a free good will bush. It would look so pretty, tucked in there between the peace and the harmony. Now if spring will just hurry up and arrive.

I'd better not wait, though. I will start these seeds right away. I'll begin them inside, to give them – and myself – a good start on the New Year.

Consider, as you go forth from St. John's today, what your garden might need. Where can our Lord Jesus Christ help open your ears and heart to the Gospel? Just as gardens are planted every spring, so we need refreshing each year. That may be one reason that these first three Sundays of Easter we read from three different gospels. Hopefully one of those readings opens your ears and your heart to the message that we are all beloved children of God, regardless of the circumstances of our life. And may you go in peace to love and serve the Lord, taking and sharing the blessings that you have been given in abundance. **Amen.**