

**Acts 3:12-19**  
**Ps. 4, 1Jn 3:1-7**  
**Luke 24:36b-48**

**Sermon**  
**By**  
**The Rev. Stephen Askew**

**3rd Sunday of Easter**  
**April 14, 2024**

A number of years ago, while serving as Canon to the Ordinary in another diocese, I was asked to fill in at a small parish on Palm Sunday. At the reading of the Passion Narrative, the story of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, a member of the parish came forward to the lectern and began to read. Before he reached the end, the part about the crucifixion itself, for some unknown reason he stopped and returned to his seat. Those around him then began to whisper to him, "that is not all, that is not the end of the reading." So the somewhat embarrassed reader went back to the lectern and read some more, but before the end of the story he again sat down. And again, a little more vocally, people said, "there is more, you have not finished." Then a third time, the lector went forward, and at last completed the reading!

For the followers of Jesus, the crucifixion must have seemed like the end of the story - a very disappointing end to their hopes and dreams and efforts. They had made great sacrifices to follow Jesus, whom Peter had eventually confessed as the Messiah. He was the one who had been sent and anointed by God to fulfill the words of the ancient prophets on up to John the Baptist, who stated in Luke's gospel: "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming . . . he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Jesus was the one who stirred the crowd on Palm Sunday to shout, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

But we are an Easter people, and we know that the crucifixion was not the end of the story. Having recently celebrated Easter Day, the day of the resurrection, we know and believe that three days after Jesus' crucifixion, the tomb where he was laid was found to be empty! The women who had returned to the tomb after the sabbath, bringing spices and ointments for Jesus' body, found the stone rolled away and Jesus' body missing! Perplexed and frightened, the women then saw two men in "dazzling apparel" appear and say to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." No, this was not the end of the story!

When told by the women what they had witnessed, the eleven apostles found their account hard to believe, as might be expected. After all, where was the body? Where was the risen Lord, if this was indeed the case? Thankfully, the story continues with a number of appearances by the resurrected Jesus. Just before today's reading from Luke, it is stated that Jesus had appeared to two of Jesus' disciples as they walked to the nearby town of Emmaus, seven or so miles from Jerusalem. Seeing that they were in conversation with each other, Jesus asked what they were discussing. Not recognizing Jesus, they related the tragedy of Jesus' death and all that had happened over the last three days. Jesus then interpreted to them the scriptures and prophecies concerning himself. When they arrived in Emmaus and broke bread with Jesus, their eyes were opened and they recognized the risen Lord! The two returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" So, the story continued.

As the two disciples were relating to the eleven their encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, we learn in today's reading from Luke that the risen Lord then appeared to the

whole group of disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Like the women at the tomb, they were surprised and frightened. Jesus offered them comfort, saying, “Peace be with you.” Then to prove that he was more than a ghost or apparition, he showed them his hands and feet, scarred from his crucifixion. As further proof, he asked for something to eat, and took a piece of broiled fish and ate it, demonstrating that he was corporally present. Then as he did for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he opened their minds to understand how the scriptures had been fulfilled through all that had happened.

But this was not the end of the story either. The resurrected Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. In the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that this is precisely what Peter and John were doing when they encountered a man, who had been lame from birth, begging at the temple gate called Beautiful. Gazing at him, Peter and John asked the man to look at them, which he did, expecting a handout. Because funds were kept for the common good of the early followers of Christ, neither Peter nor John had silver or gold of their own. Rather, Peter offered what he did have, saying, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Well, the man not only walked, but went leaping into the temple praising God! All the people who saw this were amazed and astounded. Denying that it was through his or John’s own power that this man had been healed, Peter taught the people that it was through faith in the name of the resurrected Jesus that the man now walked. Moreover, what was told through the prophets had indeed been fulfilled through Christ. “Therefore, repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,” declared Peter.

4

Is this the end of the story? By no means! We are an Easter people, and we know that much was written and preached by the other apostles, most of whom died as martyrs, or witnesses, for Christ. We know that Paul, who once persecuted the followers of Jesus, encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and was converted, becoming an

apostle to the gentiles. We know that we, who are sinners, have been baptized into the church of Christ, are God's beloved children, and make up the living body of Christ in the world to carry on his teaching, preaching, and healing. We carry on his story, which is now our story as well.

If our eyes, minds, and hearts have been opened by the risen Lord, we should be able, like the disciples before us, to look at the world around us, even with fear and amazement, knowing that in the name of Jesus Christ, sins are forgiven, miracles continue take place, and love does not die. After all, isn't that the highlight of the Easter Story - while hate and anger may try to destroy life, evil never has the last word. No, God's love never dies! The story is not ended!

In one of his recent daily meditations, Richard Rohr states: "The resurrection is not a miracle story to prove the divinity of Christ, something that makes him a winner [end of story]. It's a storyline that allows us all to be winners. ALL! No exceptions! There is no eternal death for anybody: All are invited to draw upon this infinite Source, this infinite Mystery, this infinite Love, this infinite Possibility. Spiritually speaking, we live in a world of abundance, of infinity. But most of us walk around as if it were not true, operating in a world of scarcity where there's never enough..." Perhaps that is why we find ourselves surprised or amazed to see God's love acted out in the world around us. We just thought the story was over!

5

And, we don't need to wait for our own death to experience resurrection for ourselves. Resurrection occurs whenever we love someone, even if they are not very loving to us. New life is found when we decide to trust and seek the healing of relationships, even though we have experienced repeated failures. Death is overcome each time we refuse to be negative, cynical, or hopeless in a world that seems to be filled with violence, hatred, injustice, and destruction. Just when we think the end is near - the end of God's story, the

end of our story, the end of human kind's story, God miraculously points the way to a narrative, to new life.

What better time of year to see the continuation of new life than now, in the spring! Because Easter Day came early this year, we are still in the midst of trees blooming and leaves unfolding, flowers popping up unexpectedly, fragrances catching us unawares and attracting bees and insects to pollinate the world, the days getting longer and warmer, drawing us outside of our man-made cocoons. And somewhat to our surprise, my wife and I recently learned that her son and his wife are expecting their first child in China, where the birth rate has been declining over more recent years! No, the story is not over; and contrary to what we may sometimes be led to believe, God's infinite love is ever-present, and life and resurrection continue.

In a homily given on Holy Saturday in the second century of the church, the preacher shared what he imagined Jesus might have said on that somber day: "I am God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image.

6

Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated."

So I say to you this day, let us proclaim again and again, "Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed." The story continues in Christ, in you, in me, and in all the world where we bear witness to the resurrected and eternal life of our Lord. And take care my friends, don't be too quick to go and sit down before you know for sure where the story ends. It is not here, it is not now.

