

Sermon at St John's, Rev James Shakespeare - 14th April 2024

While they were talking <with the 11 & their companions, following their return from Emmaus> Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' (Luke 24:36-48)

Friends, it's not enough that the tomb is empty. It's not enough to proclaim, '*Christ is risen!*' It's not enough to believe in the resurrection. At some point we have to move from the event of the resurrection to experiencing the resurrection. Experiencing resurrected life begins with recognizing the risen Christ among us. That is the gift of Easter and it is also the difficulty and challenge described in today's gospel.

Cleopas and his companion are telling the other disciples how Jesus appeared to them on the road to Emmaus when Jesus, again, shows up out of nowhere, interrupting their conversation. '*Peace be with you*' he says. They see him, they hear his voice, but they don't recognize him. They '*thought that they were seeing a ghost.*' They know Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. They know dead men don't come back to life. This can only be a ghost, a spirit without a body. The tomb is open but their minds are closed.

They are unable to recognize the holiness that stands among them. They are continuing to live, think, and understand in the usual human categories. They have separated spirit and matter, divinity and humanity, heaven and earth. Whenever we make that separation we close our minds, we deny ourselves the resurrected life for which Christ died, and we lose our sense of and ability to recognize holiness in the world, in one another, and in ourselves.

With Jesus' resurrection, however, God shatters human categories of who God is, where God's life & energy are to be found, and how God works in this world. Resurrected life can never be comprehended, contained, or controlled by human thought or understanding. Jesus' resurrection compels us to step outside our usual understanding of reality & enter into the divine reality.

That new reality begins with touching and seeing, flesh and bones, hands and feet, and broiled fish. Jesus said to his disciples, '*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.*' Then "he showed them his hands and his feet." After this he ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

Flesh and bones, hands and feet, and broiled fish are the things of creation, the natural order. Mary, a woman created by God, gave Jesus his flesh and bones and his hands and feet. She also gave him the stomach that would eat the fish God created. The very same flesh and bones, the very same hands and feet, appeared to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus and then '*vanished from their sight*' (Luke 24:31), and now show up unannounced and unexpected in the midst of their conversation with others.

The resurrected life of Christ, it seems, is revealed in and through the created order. It is not, however, bound by the created order. Rather, the resurrected body and life of Christ unite the visible and invisible, matter and spirit, humanity and divinity. On the one hand Jesus has a real body. On the other hand it is not subject to the natural laws of time and space. It's not one or the other. It's both. It is a new and different reality.

The degree to which we have allowed ourselves to be bound by the created order is the degree to which we are unable to see resurrected life and holiness in this world. We bind ourselves through our fears, our sorrows and losses, our runaway thoughts and distractions, our attachments and addictions to things, people, and even beliefs. Sometimes it's our unwillingness to allow or trust God to grow and change us. In binding ourselves to the created order we lose recognition of and the ability to live in the sacred. That's the very opposite of resurrected life.

The resurrected life of Christ reveals that all creation and every one of us are filled with God, with holiness, divinity. Nothing can bind or supersede the grace that is given us through resurrection: unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness, unconditional life. This is one of the most difficult things for us to see, believe, and live into. It is, however, the divine reality into which we are invited, not at some future time and place but here and now.

Christ our Lord longs and desires to open our minds to understand the scriptures, to understand all that has been written, spoken, and revealed about him in whatever form that happens and has happened. That's what Jesus did for the disciples and it's what he does for us. That the disciples are witnesses does not mean they now have all the answers. It means they now have the life Jesus wants to give them. They are witnesses based not on what they know, but on who they are, how they live, and their relationship with the risen Christ.

We don't know how this happens. There is no clear-cut set of instructions or a to-do list. That would be like giving a set of instructions on how to fall in love. The resurrected life is not acquired it is received... It happens when we risk unbinding ourselves from the usual ways of seeing, living, and relating. This is not a rejection of the natural order. It is allowing the natural order to open to and reveal something more. That's what happened for the disciples with Jesus' hands and feet, with his flesh and bones, and the broiled fish. They saw and recognized something about Jesus and in so doing they saw and recognized something about themselves: holiness. It happens for us too.

Think about a time in your life when you lost track of time... I don't mean you forgot what time it was, but that you were so awake, so present, that you entered a new world. Think about a time when life seemed more real than it ever had and you touched or tasted life in a way never before. Recall a moment when your heart opened, softened, and you knew you were somehow different. Remember that day when you sensed something new was being offered you; possibilities that you did not create for yourself. They just opened up. Reflect on that moment when you realized that you were ok and could again start to live. Those are the moments when Christ opens our minds to understand. They are moments of awe and wonder that leave us in sacred silence. They fill our eyes with tears. We weep, not from

sorrow or pain, but the water of new life. They are the moments in which we say, *'I never want this to end. I don't want to leave this place.'*

In each of those moments the one who is fully alive and risen, the Christ, is calling us to see and recognize him, to join him, and to discover our new life... a life that is made new, through the power of the risen Christ; & is greater than suffering, sin & death. The resurrection life, in which all is made new. This is the authentic self we long to become, the self that we already are, and the self we are becoming. This is resurrected life.

Let's not lose this moment. Your life is too important to let that happen. Carry today's Gospel with you through the week. Let it open your eyes, your heart, and your mind to the life Christ is offering you. Let it be the voice of Christ opening your mind to understand. Sit with it. Pray with it. Wrestle with it. Trust it. And as soon as you catch a glimpse of the risen Christ and your own resurrection give thanks, and praise God that Christ comes even to ordinary women & men, like me & you...

'You are witnesses of these things,' Jesus tells us. Tell it. Live it. Believe it. Become it. The resurrected life is yours. You are witnesses. *'Peace be with you.'*