

Easter Sunday – The Resurrected Life

Luke 24:1-12

April 9, 2023

Pastor Tami Luckhardt

Happy Easter, church! This is a day when Christians all over the world are raising their voices in praise, singing songs and telling the good news of Easter that *Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.* But when telling the Easter story, we can't just start with Easter morning because it is not just about what happened on Sunday morning. To get the full story, we must include the events of last week, Holy Week, including Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and especially Good Friday, and not just hear **what** happened but **why** it happened.

Today we are wrapping up our 6 week journey of reading through the Gospel of Luke together. Since February, we've been reading about how Jesus consistently lifts up the lowly, the very old and the very young, women, sinners, those who society has pushed to the margins and even criminals. Just a week ago, on Palm Sunday, the disciples, and multitudes of people, Luke tells us, followed Jesus into Jerusalem and the whole crowd began joyfully praising God in loud voices. They had put all their hopes and dreams on Jesus being their savior and would renew Israel. The week started out with so much promise and hope, but by Thursday, after the last supper in the upper room, Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the garden. On Friday, around 9am he was crucified and because of the prolonged agony of death by crucifixion, he died around 3pm that the afternoon. It was then that his body was taken off the cross and laid in the tomb. And his disciples and followers were completely and utterly devastated. Their faith in Jesus, the Messiah, died on the cross with Jesus. That's how last week ended but today is Easter and Jesus' resurrection brings new life, new purpose and renewed hope.

Luke tells us that on that first Easter, the women went to the tomb early in the morning to anoint Jesus's body but found that the tomb was empty. Two angels standing there asked them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has been raised." And so, the women went back to the eleven disciples and reported what they had seen but they didn't believe the women, their words seemed like nonsense to them.

Later that same day, two of his followers, a man named Cleopas and another, unnamed follower, many scholars believe it was probably his wife, Mary, were headed out of Jerusalem back to their home town of Emmaus, about a 7 mile walk. Having no idea of what had happened at the tomb, they were completely devastated by the events of the day. Truthfully, it's hard to imagine a more devastating conclusion to what should have been triumphant joy. No reason to stay in Jerusalem and all they could think about was their pain, disappointment, and loss.

And as they were talking to each other about everything that had happened... Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. [But] they were prevented from recognizing him.

I get that. I've been here. Maybe you have too. Those moments of complete devastation and loss when you cannot even think or see straight. When sadness, pain, and grief keep you from seeing hope, seeing Jesus, even when he is right there beside you. You feel like you are living a "crucifixion" moment, and you feel empty inside, devoid of hope, and devoid of life, and you feel like giving up. You need a resurrection moment. That must have been how Cleopas and Mary were feeling.

Then Jesus asks, *"What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stopped, their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?" He said to them, "What things?"*

And so, they told him. They told him about this movement that Jesus had started, in which they had placed all their hope but now he was dead, and they were done. They were going home. They had given up on Jesus to the point where they couldn't even recognize his face, even as

he was right there with them. This was a crucifixion moment for them. They needed a resurrection moment.

There's a story that Brennan Manning, author and pastor, tells about an Episcopal priest from Columbus, Ohio, named Kevin Martin who was experiencing a crucifixion moment in his life. One Monday morning, he walked into his office, his church office, and wrote a hasty letter of resignation. Then he went back to his house, sat down at the kitchen table, and wrote a letter to his wife and three young children, and he said that he was leaving his job, leaving the ministry and leaving them. Then he got in his car and drove to a logging camp in Vermont as began a new life as a lumberjack.

Well, January rolled around. It was a Saturday morning, snowing heavily and temperatures had dripped -10 degrees. Kevin was sitting in his aluminum trailer that he had rented, and his only source of heat was a tiny portable space heater. When suddenly, the heater quit and died. Within minutes, the temperature in the trailer plunged down to zero. Shivering and in a fit of rage, Kevin picked up the heater, flung it through the window, broke the window, and collapsed to his knees and began sobbing uncontrollably. And it was in that moment when he shouted, "Christ, I hate you. God, get out of my life. I'm finished with this Christian stuff. It's all over." Kevin needed a resurrection moment. It was then, in what Manning describes as the bright darkness of faith, that he heard a voice from somewhere deep within him, somewhere deep within his soul say, "It's okay, Kevin. I understand. I'm here. I am with you, and I am for you." Then Kevin heard weeping. Not his weeping but weeping that was coming from inside of him and he recognized that it was Jesus who was weeping... right along within him. Christ felt what he was feeling. It was an overwhelming feeling of intimacy and closeness to Jesus. **Kevin needed a resurrection moment, and he got it.** That same afternoon he packed his bag, returned to Ohio and reconciled with his family and with his church. And then he went on to pastor an alive, dynamic, and Spirit-filled church in Seattle, Washington. **The good news of Easter for Kevin and for you is that through the Jesus' resurrection, we are given new life.**

A second story. In 1735, John Wesley, as a young Anglican priest and the founder of the methodist movement, was traveling to America as a missionary when the ship he was on got caught in powerful storm. Wesley and all the sailors were scared for their lives. But in the midst of the chaos, he noticed a group of men, women and children who were in below deck singing hymns and praising God. They didn't seem frightened at all. And here he was, a priest, a man of God, who was afraid of dying. It was at that moment he realized he had no faith. He wondered how in the world he could continue in the ministry if he had no faith? He confided with a trusted friend about his crisis of faith, but this friend encouraged him to not make any rash decisions and instead, "Preach faith, until you have it." And so, out of complete desperation, not knowing what else to do, Wesley went through the motions and preached faith.

Until one Wednesday in May of 1738, still struggling with his faith, he went very unwilling to a Bible study on Aldersgate Street because that is what he had promised his friend he would do. At that meeting, someone was reading a writing from Martin Luther. This was a defining moment for Wesley. Listen to what he wrote in his journal later that night. "As he described the change that God works in the heart though faith in Jesus Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. And I felt that I did trust in Christ. Christ alone for my salvation. An assurance was given to me that he had taken away sin, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." **Wesley needed a resurrection moment, and he got it.** For the next 50 years, he traveled throughout England preaching the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **The good news of Easter for Wesley and for you is that through the Jesus' resurrection, you are given a new purpose.**

One more story. In December of 2019, Pastor Steve Richards, who had served as the senior pastor here at Messiah Church for 22 years, shared with our leadership team that he planned to retire in July of 2022. Then, in August of 2021, just 8 months later, Steve's wife, Amanda was

diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Steve told me that if he had ever had a doubt about whether it was the right time to retire, all doubt was gone.

From the very beginning, Amanda has asked for prayers for more quality time with her family and that she would not suffer. It's been a long 21-month journey of ups and downs. Just last month, after weeks of excruciating pain in her right leg and hip, Amanda learned that cancer had infiltrated her femur and that she'd need to have a titanium rod inserted to protect the femur from fracturing. In addition, a new chemo was needed to treat the progressing cancer. The surgery went well but almost immediately, as a side effect of this new chemo, Amanda developed mouth and throat sores. There was nothing she could eat or drink that went down easily. She could not sleep, even talking was painful. She was allergic to all the possible treatments and the pain was debilitating. And so, for days, she sat and suffered. **Amanda needed a resurrection moment.**

In desperation, Steve made a post on her CaringBridge site asking for prayers for Amanda for relief from the pain. They had experienced the power of prayer in the past and would be grateful for anyone who would hold her in prayer now. It was about that same time, Amanda settled into a chair to meditate, when she felt an overwhelming wave of hope and optimism. It was only then that she checked her CaringBridge site and saw that Steve had posted the prayer request. When I visited her last week, she described it like this *whoosh*, that ran throughout her body. Hope was renewed. Almost immediately, Amanda felt a change in her level of pain and just as important, a renewed sense of hope. The pain was not eliminated, and her cancer has not disappeared, but that is not necessary to see the tangible evidence of prayer and hope renewed. Amanda needed a resurrection moment and she got it. **The good news of Easter for Amanda and for you is that through Jesus' resurrection, hope is renewed.**

So, let's circle back to Cleopas and Mary because we left them walking on the road with Jesus, still not knowing who he was. As Jesus walked with them he reminded him of everything he had taught them and then he interpreted for them the things written about him in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. And as they arrived at their home in Emmaus, they invited Jesus to come in and stay with them. And as they sat down to eat dinner together, Jesus *...took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"*

Realizing what had just happened they "got up," and it says "they walked" (I'm guessing it was more of trot or a jog) the 7 miles back to Jerusalem. When they arrived they told the other disciples all that they had seen and heard, only to discover that through some inexplicable resurrection power, Jesus had just been there, too. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. **They need a resurrection moment, and they got it.**

Twentieth century American writer and theologian, Frederick Buechner, wrote something that we say around here often at Messiah Church, and it has come to define the Easter story for me. **Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing.** Death does not have the final word for you or for me.

Because in Jesus' death and resurrection, light conquers darkness, love overcomes hate, life defeats death. The death and resurrection of Jesus shows us that these powers of darkness, evil, sin, war, sickness, hate, tragedy, and death will ultimately be defeated.

We will all have crucifixion moments in life, but life with Jesus also includes resurrection moments where life and joy and hope come out of tragedy and defeat. For Kevin Martin, it was when he heard Jesus weeping with him. For John Wesley, it was when he forced himself to go to that Bible study. For Amanda, it was when she felt an overwhelming sense of hope through the power of prayer. For Cleopas and Mary, it was in the breaking of the bread. Some of you

have come here today because you really need a word of hope, a resurrection moment in your life. You need to know that regardless of your age, race, gender or sexuality, Jesus is right here with you, he sees, he understands what you are going through and he loves you more than you will ever know.

Let me leave you with this last thought from Frederick Buechner's book, **The Magnificent Defeat**, "*Jesus is apt to come into the very midst of life at its most real and inescapable. Not in a blaze of unearthly light, not in the midst of a sermon, not in the throes of some kind of religious daydream, but . . . at supper time, or walking along a road, or in a trailer in Vermont or a living room in St. Paul. This is the element that [these] stories about Christ's return to life have in common: He never approached from on high, but always in the midst, in the midst of people, in the midst of real life and the questions that real life asks.*"

This our calling as Easter people, to go out into the midst of people, into the midst of real life and live with this hope at the center of our lives, bearing witness to the resurrection and bringing the good news to others that, resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing. Do I believe it? You bet I do. And I'm not only hoping for it, but I'm counting on it. And I hope and pray that you will too. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Oh God, how grateful we are that you came and walked among us in the flesh, to help us understand who you are and who you call us to be. That you endured suffering and experienced what we experience and so you know and understand our pain. You showed us in the cross and resurrection how you redeem our pain and bring beauty and hope from our crucifixion moments. You showed us how you triumph over sin, evil, hate, self-doubt and even death. Because you live, we will live also. God, we pray that on this Easter, you will bring life and light, hope and joy to all people who are experiencing a crucifixion moment or season in their life. Help us to live not only as people who walk through crucifixion moments but those who expect, experience and make possible for others, the resurrected life. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 9, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Eternal God, your presence and power is with us. We praise you for never giving up on us, for loving us with a love from which nothing can separate us. Help us to become ever more aware of your activity and presence, so that we will see you more clearly at work in the midst of all the pain and joy of life. Amen.

Monday, April 10

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:3-20

I passed on to you as most important what I also received: Christ died for our sins in line with the scriptures, he was buried, and he rose on the third day in line with the scriptures. He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve, and then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at once—most of them are still alive to this day, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me, as if I were born at the wrong time. I'm the least important of the apostles. I don't deserve to be called an apostle, because I harassed God's church. I am what I am by God's grace, and God's grace hasn't been for nothing. In fact, I have worked harder than all the others—that is, it wasn't me but the grace of God that is with me. So then, whether you heard the message from me or them, this is what we preach and this is what you have believed. So if the message that is preached says that Christ has been raised from the dead, then how can some of you say, "There's no resurrection of the dead"? If there's no resurrection of the dead, then Christ hasn't been raised either. If Christ hasn't been raised, then our preaching is useless and your faith is useless. We are found to be false witnesses about God, because we testified against God that he raised

Christ, when he didn't raise him if it's the case that the dead aren't raised. If the dead aren't raised, then Christ hasn't been raised either. If Christ hasn't been raised, then your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins, and what's more, those who have died in Christ are gone forever. If we have a hope in Christ only in this life, then we deserve to be pitied more than anyone else. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. He's the first crop of the harvest^[a] of those who have died.

Observation

This is the first written witness to Jesus' resurrection. Paul replied to some in Corinth who denied the Christian hope of resurrection. We still hear similar views: "We all know dead people don't rise." Against such "wisdom," Paul spoke of meeting the living Jesus, and of over 500 other eyewitnesses (verses 6-7). Take out the resurrection of Jesus, and there is nothing left on which to rest faith—only the decomposing corpse of an itinerant Jewish carpenter-turned-rabbi. As I said in my message this past Sunday, "I not only believe it—I am counting on it."

Application

It would have been simplicity itself for Jewish or Roman authorities to put a stop to early Christian preaching like Paul's by just producing Jesus' dead body. They didn't because they couldn't—the tomb was empty. How can Paul's confident appeal to hundreds of still-living eyewitnesses deepen your faith in the reality of Jesus' resurrection? What difference does it make to you that Jesus is alive today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, on the Sunday after you died on the cross, your tomb was empty! Thank you for defeating death for all of us, forever. Bring more life to my living because I choose you each day. Amen

Tuesday, April 11

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying. Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means *Teacher*). Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father,

to my God and your God.” Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, “I’ve seen the Lord.” Then she told them what he said to her.

Observation

“Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying”—she had watched in agony as Jesus died, and now his body seemed to be missing from his tomb. She sought help from two people in the tomb and a person she thought was a gardener. All the gospels reported incidents in which people initially failed to recognize Jesus. But Mary recognized the voice that called her by name—it was him! Suddenly hope lived—because Jesus lived!

Application

Mary moved in a flash from utter despair to faith and joy. Verse 16 says she “turned,” though she had already “turned around” in verse 14. This time she ‘turned’ to Him; she changed directions. It is the movement from grief to joy, from death to life. We all face experiences so painful, losses so devastating, that all we can do at first is weep. What makes your heart weep today? Step into this story, hear Jesus call you by name, as he did Mary, and “turn” to him as she did.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, too often I find my mind, my inner “eyesight,” turned away from you and your kingdom. Help me, like Mary, to turn to you, and to find the joy of your presence with me. Amen.

Wednesday, April 12

Scripture: Luke 24:1-35

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn’t know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn’t here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn’t believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” They stopped, their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?” He said to them, “What things?” They said to him, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. But there’s more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning and didn’t find his body. They came to us saying that

they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn't see him." Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?" They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying to each other, "The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!" Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

Observation

Note the bluntly honest way the gospels reported how even the disciples initially reacted to Jesus' resurrection. Luke said that the women's testimony "struck the apostles as nonsense" (verse 11). He then told of two disciples walking to Emmaus, locked in despair, unable to recognize Jesus during seven miles of walking and talking. Then "their eyes were opened" (verse 31), they recognized the Lord, and they hurried to share the wonderful news.

Application

Verse 29 says Cleopas and the other disciple urged their unrecognized companion to stay with them. If they hadn't, they'd have missed that joyous moment when they recognized him as Jesus. How urgent are you about inviting Jesus into your life? How can you more clearly recognize his presence in the midst of everyday life?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you've promised to be with me. But sometimes my eyes are closed, and I feel all alone. So now I invite you, I "urge" you: "Stay with me" now and always. Amen.

Thursday, April 13

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-20

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. Look, there was a great earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven. Coming to the stone, he rolled it away and sat on it. Now his face was like lightning and his clothes as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn't here, because he's been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him. Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, 'He's been raised from the dead. He's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' I've given the message to you." With great fear and excitement, they hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. But Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there."

Now as the women were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. They met with the elders and decided to give a large sum of money to the soldiers. They told them, "Say that Jesus' disciples came at night and stole his

body while you were sleeping. And if the governor hears about this, we will take care of it with him so you will have nothing to worry about.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were told. And this report has spread throughout all Judea to this very day.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

Observation

Like the other gospels, Matthew said women were the first witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection (hardly a fact one writer, let alone four, would invent in that male-dominated culture). He noted the plot to spread a false account of what became of Jesus’ body. He ended with a grand summary of Jesus’ mission for, and promise to, all his followers (the “Great Commission”—verses 19-20).

Application

Mark’s resurrection story matched Matthew’s—with one vital extra detail. In Mark 16:7, the angel said, “Tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter, who publicly denied even knowing Jesus, was specifically included, by name. What does this tell you about Jesus’ grace toward Peter, or toward you when you fail?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you turn my world and its values upside down, and I can feel “great fear” and “excitement” about that. Because you promise to be with me, I choose to boldly move into the reality you lived and died to open to me. Amen.

Friday, April 14

Scripture: John 20:19-31

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We’ve seen the Lord!” But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won’t believe.” After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!” Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.” Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples’ presence, signs that aren’t recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

Observation

On Sunday evening, Jesus appeared to the hiding, frightened disciples, and said, "Peace be with you" (verse 19). When Jesus "showed them his hands and his side" (verse 20), they believed it was really him. But Thomas was not with them and refused to take their word for it. Eight days later, Jesus showed himself to Thomas, just as he had to the other disciples. In verse 29, Jesus said, "Happy are those who don't see and yet believe." This was not to shame Thomas, but to encourage all the believers to come.

Application

In verse 31, John said that "these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name." Trust and faith came hard, even to the disciples. When have you struggled to believe? How did you make it through those "crucifixion" times? Where does your "trust quotient" stand now?

Prayer

Risen Lord, keep me trusting that you are alive and working for good in my life, and may I help others see you in the things I say and do. Amen.

Saturday, April 15

Scripture: John 21:1-19

Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus^[a]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing." They said, "We'll go with you." They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus. Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren't far from shore, only about one hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

Observation

After the resurrection, the disciples went fishing at night. Near dawn Jesus (“the light of the world”— John 8:12, 1:4-9) came and did something they could not do for themselves—he brought them a great catch of fish. Then he specifically did for Peter what Peter could not do for himself—leading him through a process by which he could lay aside his guilt over denying Jesus, and setting out on a path of service and solemn joy as he answered Jesus’ renewed call to “follow me.”

Application

Verse 18 said, “Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’” What made it important for Peter to “undo” his triple denial of Jesus? In what ways can it be painful to face the issues that keep you from following God fully? What makes it worth working through that pain with God (and a wise counselor or spiritual guide, when necessary)? How can that process open the door to finding the kind of life Jesus described in John 10:10 as living “life to the fullest”?

Prayer

O God, when Jesus rose from the dead, it was as though he threw open the windows and fully let the light of your power, love, and grace shine into our world. I want to live in and into your glorious light and life every day. Amen.