

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Easter 3, April 18, 2021

READINGS:

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

I John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever felt like you just walked in on the second act of a play, or after intermission at the movies, or picked up a book at the twelfth chapter?

I felt just like that when I first read today's Gospel and today's first reading in preparation for my sermon. Sometimes pronouns will do that to you!

Our reading from Luke's Gospel begins with "While they were talking about THIS, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'"

What "this" is Luke talking about?

Our Acts reading opens with "When Peter saw IT, he addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?'"

What is "it?"

Both of these readings obviously have something to do with what happened immediately before they begin. Let's take a short moment to see what!

We all remember the famous "walk to Emmaus" in Luke's Gospel. Two disciples walk from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus with Jesus, not knowing it IS Jesus. On the way, he opens their minds to understand the scriptures, and he stays to have dinner with them. When they recognize him as he breaks the bread, Luke tells us he vanishes from their sight.

As our reading opens today, these two disciples have hustled back to Jerusalem and are explaining to the other disciples how they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Aha! That is the "this" that begins the reading!

In our reading from Acts, the reason for Peter's speech is a healing that precedes it, also a famous story in scripture. Peter and John are continuing their practice of worshiping at the Temple, and on the way in through the Beautiful Gate, they encounter a well-known beggar. They have no money, but they heal him in the name "of Jesus Christ the Nazarene." The man doesn't just walk off - he leaps "like a stag," as Isaiah says in his oracle about Israel's deliverance.

At the beginning of our reading today, the people nearby are astonished to see the lame beggar leaping and praising God, and they show it! There we go - that astonishment is the "it" that prompts Peter to speak.

I love today's readings. They don't need what comes before to make them draw the eyes of our hearts.

Our Gospel shows a resurrected Jesus who is different. The disciples don't recognize him at first when they see him. He simply appears in their midst, offering them his peace. Doors and walls are no longer obstacles to his presence with them. As Jesuit priest John Kavanaugh puts it, "This is a Jesus of sight and sound, of memories and relationships, of love and tenderness. He would take food and allow himself to be touched. Even his wounds could be examined. It was a recognizable and identifiable Jesus..."

Luke tells us that he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, just as he had already done on the Emmaus road. "Thus it is written," he says to them, "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."

In our Acts reading, we see that Peter "gets it" - he understands what a witness does, and he does it! First, he provides healing, as Jesus himself did. The beggar at the temple gate was hoping for a coin, but he got something more, much more! The gift of mobility sent him leaping and praising God, and it drew a crowd of the curious, wondering how he had been healed.

The crowd is Peter's opportunity for witness, and witness he does! As Jesus had done for the disciples, Peter opens the scriptures to the crowd, interpreting the beggar's healing against the long story of God's interaction with Israel, and emphasizing that Jesus is the "prophet-like-Moses" whom God has raised from the dead, and that the healing of the beggar has come

about through faith in his name. "Repent therefore," Peter tells the crowd, "and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out." Quite a witness from a Galilean fisherman!

There is an old legend that says an angel came up to Jesus in heaven and asked him how his work would be carried out on earth now that Jesus was no longer there. Jesus answered, "I have disciples. I taught them how God wants them to live." The angel said, "They must be very special people." "No," said Jesus, "they are ordinary people, but they heard my message and I asked them to tell it to others."

"What is these disciples should fail?" asked the angel. "What if they or the others who hear about your way of life do not care enough to follow it and to share it with others? What other plan have you made?" Jesus replied, "I have no other plan."

We are here now, the church is here now, because other witnesses "got it!" They followed the first disciples. Like their Lord, they have found opportunities to be healers. Like him, they have preached the good news of God's forgiveness to all the nations. Because of their witness, and in spite of their flaws, we continue to follow Jesus, looking for him ahead of us on the road of life, beside us along the way, and in the people we meet day by day.

We have not walked into the second act of a play.

We have not joined the movie after intermission.

We are not in chapter twelve of a book.

We are right where we need to be!

It is our task to choose to be healers.

It is our task to preach the good news of God's forgiveness to EVERYONE.

How do we do it?

I think we do it one decision at a time.

One day my husband Bob left me in the front seat of our little pickup while he went into a McDonalds to grab some lunch.

I saw him come out, but he didn't come back to the truck. Instead, he leaned down and started to talk to someone I couldn't see, someone sitting on the sidewalk. I thought: "No surprise there - Bob will talk to anybody!"

Next, he opened the restaurant door for three teens, and shepherded them inside. When he came back, he told me he had bought them lunch. "They didn't ask for anything, but they were traveling, and they were hungry," he told me.

As we drove off with our lunch, we could see those kids through the window, happily eating theirs! Healing and good news, one decision at a time!

Jesus answered the angel, "I have disciples. I taught them how God wants them to live."

Amen.