

Luke 24:36b-48
St. Marks's - April 14, 2023
Fourth Sunday of Easter
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Be amazed!

Luke 24:36b-48

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, 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.

Be amazed!

Easter is a time of joy-filled, amazing moments, but before that we experience Holy Week.

In Holy Week we are overcome with the sadness endured by Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; Lazarus, Martha, and their sister Mary; John and his brother James; Thaddeus; Simon the Zealot; Andrew and his brother Peter; Thomas; Philip; Matthew; Bartholomew and the other James.

We are overcome by the sadness of all those who loved Jesus and had been crushed by his treatment at the hands of their rulers and his death on the tortuous cross.

From the depths of that sadness comes Easter. From the depths of that sadness comes our resurrected savior appearing to those closest to him, alive and in the flesh.

They don't recognize him immediately and in their amazement they struggle with believing that it is truly Jesus that stands before them. But he speaks to them, calls them by name, eats with them, appears out of nowhere and disappears just as suddenly.

It's only in living (in our imaginations) with those who wept through the horrors of Holy Week that we can feel their joy as they realize that it is Jesus resurrected that comes to them as what we know as Easter unfolds before them.

The gospel selections of our Easter lectionary tell of these amazing moments of fear, disbelief, and elation as Jesus' chosen few encounter him after he conquered death.

We read about Mary Magdalene and the other Mary meeting Jesus. Taking hold of him, and worshiping him.

“Jesus told them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’” (Matthew 28:9)

We read about Mary Magdalene weeping when she found Jesus' body missing from his tomb. She spoke with Jesus, but only recognized him when he said her name and then,

“Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”
Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” (John 20:17-18)

Another of our readings takes us to the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-35) The couple that encountered Jesus on that road didn't recognize him, although they knew his story well.

He taught them about all the things foretold in the scriptures, about himself, and it wasn't until he broke bread with them that they finally realized who he was and then he vanished!

“That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Jesus showed himself to his disciples at the Sea of Galilee after they had spent the night fishing and caught nothing. He told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and their catch was so large that it tore the net.

After all of this The Gospel According to St. Mark says this:

“And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.” (Mark 16:20)

Imagine the emotions evoked by any one of these encounters. The fear, confusion, excitement, and anticipation. Imagine the peace these chosen few experienced. It is that peace that we are invited to share. The peace of God that passes all understanding. The peace that comes from knowing that the horrors of Holy Week make possible the joys of our life in Christ today.

We humans are capable of unspeakable acts of horror. Horrors fed by Satan. The horrors of Holy Week.

Yet we humans are also capable of extraordinary acts of love confronting evil both simple and intimate and world altering. The mother who takes in children whose parents have been killed and loves them as her own. The teacher who devotes his life to making others' lives richer and the researcher who devotes her life to making other lives possible. The fire-fighters who walk into danger so that others might be saved.

All of these good acts are acts of love. God is love. We are capable of choosing love over fear. The women who stayed with Jesus while he hung on

the cross. The women who cared for his burial and returned to the tomb even as soldiers watched choose love over fear.

It is God from whom all good comes; whether we know it or not, whether we accept it or not. It is God from whom all blessings flow.

As we reflect on the weeks just past I pray that we will always choose that path of good. That we will dwell on the amazing truth that God above all else is love. That God is good. That we will choose love over fear.

I pray that our faith will be strengthened through the scriptures, through Jesus. Through his life, and his death. That our faith will be strengthened through his resurrection and his ascension into Heaven.

I pray that our doubts will be overcome by our knowledge of the Risen Christ and the Spirit who dwells within us.

I pray that each of us will live through our moments of fear and confusion that they quickly move to amazement and then overwhelming joy and peace as we see Jesus standing before us, risen from the grave.

I pray that in our mind we can hear Jesus call us by name. I pray that he will appear to us suddenly out of nowhere and disappear just as suddenly. Time and time again as we live our lives on this side of Heaven.

I pray that we will live in the Peace of God that passes all understanding now and always.

I pray that we will be filled with the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the father always and forever. As our lives are changed daily by our faith as we journey towards salvation.

Amen.