

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

To say I have one specific or favorite passage within Holy Scripture is difficult...there are several that speak to me in different ways and I hear them, recognize them and perceive them differently when I am in a certain mindset, emotional state, or mood. Nonetheless, the story that I always enjoy speaks to this very issue about our distinction between perception and recognition...we see but do we recognize?

The particular story that I am referring to is one of the early post-resurrection appearances of Jesus after his crucifixion and the discovery of the empty tomb, entitled the "Road to Emmaus." It tells of two disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple traveling *down* a road away from Jerusalem after the death of Jesus and in their travels an unrecognizable Jesus joins them and walks with them. As evening falls the three stop to rest and break bread together and Jesus is recognized in that moment when bread is broken. Just as they recognized Jesus, he vanishes and Cleopas and the other disciple high-tail it back to Jerusalem and we hear that:

^{33b} they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. (Luke 24:33b)

They found the eleven and their companions gathered together...and it is in this gathering or assembly that our Gospel begins today...this is the group Jesus himself stood among or as Luke's Greek would say, the group that Jesus stands before and speaks or preaches, "Peace be with you." And it is in these early verses about this gathering that all the Easter emotions and themes are brought up once again...emotions and themes such as fear and doubt.

We hear within the lessons that have been presented to us over the last few weeks that even among the closest followers of Jesus Christ there existed fear and doubt. And why not, we hear in the Epistle to the Hebrews that:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31)

It just seems that from the morning that Jesus is Risen, we are frightened, but we are not certain why we are frightened, nor are we certain that this is even Jesus Christ that is frightening us.

Easter is not just a message that "Jesus is raised from the dead!" The Good News of Easter is more specifically that Jesus is raised *for us*...Jesus returns to us, the very ones who fear him, the very ones who betray him, and in this Resurrection of Jesus Christ we learn that he is raised and he is determined to raise us to new life as well...why then would we fear this?

But the question becomes for us then, do we really see this and do we fully recognize WHY Jesus is risen...or do our perceptions and recognitions keep Jesus sealed in our different tombs within our established discriminations? When Luke writes about the reaction of those gathered, we hear that: ³⁷ They were startled and terrified...(Luke 24:37) What is this gathering startled and terrified of...is it seeing Jesus that terrifies them? Or is it, Jesus seeing them and us for who we really are?

How do we today, on this Third Sunday of the Eastertide, the 24th day of April in the 2024th Year of our Lord...how do we on this very day, leave this gathering and proclaim and bear witness to this extraordinary good news that Jesus Christ is Risen!? What do we say beyond or away from this gathering...this congregation? What is it we see right now...in this assembly, in this Holy Word, in this Holy Meal...what is it we see...and how will we witness to this in order to keep our true sinful self hidden?

For me, personally, right now in this moment, I am somewhat frightened to be in the presence of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, but what frightens me more this is that the risen Lord, Jesus Christ sees me for who I really am. And in that...my doubt is stirred...and from that perception I recognize that Jesus could NOT love me or want to be with me simply because there were times in my life that I didn't love Jesus as he loves me...and yes, that same sentiment about Jesus remains in my heart at times now. So yes, *right now*, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, because not only are we in His presence, He sees our true presence God sees us for who we truly are.

Yes, we are the folks who DO NOT really want to know, *WWJD*, what Jesus would do so we can do it...we just want to know so we can tell others to do it. Herein lies our original sin...our initial fall from grace...we want to be God, or rather God's authority and judgment according to our perception and recognition of God and according to our perception and recognition of ourselves as well.

We perceive and recognize the righteousness of our lives under the grace of God through OUR FAITH!...but at the same time, we perceive and recognize that *THEY don't* and this becomes our witness to the resurrection. Is this what we fear? Is this why we are terrified at the very thought of encountering the grace of the risen Lord or becoming that grace for others? Are we just simply afraid of God's perception and recognition of us or are we afraid of God's perception and recognition of them *OVER US*?

The brutally honest answers to these very questions ought to be our proclamation, and our very witness...that in the shortcoming of our own sin and shame the risen Christ comes to us, his disheartened, frightened, and sinful disciples and reveals himself to us...stands before us...a gathered community we call a congregation, reassures us by saying to us..."Peace be with you, my peace I give you."

This very encounter with the Risen Lord that we experience today in Word and Sacrament, is done in the community of one another, a gathering that is Jesus Christ...a gathering that reveals who God really is: the one who loves us NOT according to our perception and recognition but according to what God makes known to us in this community.

God has shown us through Jesus Christ that God really wants to be with us, God even transcends death in order to be with us. In this very church community and within our own lives we experience this truth: the risen Christ comes and stands among us and gives us peace. This is our faith...may this be our perception and our recognition that we as witnesses take from here, NOT just in our words but in our truths and our actions.

Please keep in mind that the perception and recognition that I am stressing is *NOT JUST* who Jesus Christ is in the resurrection, but who we are as sinners within a worshipping community, and what that resurrection means for us and who we are in light of the resurrection...as a community.

We hear throughout our lessons today the resurrection is known in community. In this community centered in the Resurrected Jesus Christ, we are freed from the isolation that sin creates. But that invites the question, what is sin in the light of the resurrection? Sin in light of the resurrection is characterized in our appointed lessons today as ignorance, or “not knowing.”¹ In other words, “Sin is defined as self-focused attention rather than outward reflection.”² Or we can say simply this way, as we sit here piously in our gathering and focus on ourselves and how good we feel, and how righteous we are in our gathering...as we remain sinful. We remain ignorant of the magnificence of grace made known to us through ordinary means such as water, bread, wine, and words within this community and then turn around and say...hooray for us and to hell with you all out there.

In this community...in this gathering...where God’s healing and forgiving goodness is made known to us through Word and Sacrament, all of this ought to compel us to want to share freely...as Jesus would do!...not just our material gifts but our spiritual gifts of grace and mercy as well.³

This community this gathering is not isolated nor confined by the walls that surround us. This gathering, this community is merely limited and confined by our ignorance, our unwillingness and our lack of sharing the very grace and mercy that blesses each of us gathered here today and throughout the days ahead of us. Our community is not maintained by just wielding our assumed judgment and self-righteousness, nor our command for others to be just like us, think like us and act like us, our community is maintained and expanded through forgiveness and grace within a graceless age. Within this gathered community today, may we keep in mind what St. Paul tells the church in Corinth within his second letter:

Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:15)

For this gathering today, we know that, indeed, Christ is risen, and because Christ is risen, we who once were blind now see, we who once were lame now walk, we who once were hungry are now fed, we who once were dead are alive, and we who once were ordinary are now the sublime body of Christ in this community. We are witnesses of Jesus Christ...we are the innocence and righteousness of Jesus Christ in the world, we are the sinners who are witnesses of repentance *and forgiveness* for the world; we are the sinners who are the bearers of the Good News FOR the world but at the same time and despite our sin, we are the bread and wine for the world...we feed the grace of God to the world. We are these things in the world...and if the world does not know these things they do not know the grace and life of Jesus Christ and he remains in the tomb.

¹ Rev. Dr. Dirk G. Lange, *Sundays and Seasons, Preaching Year B 2018*. Commentary on appointed lessons for April 15, 2018, Third Sunday of Easter. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017. Page 141.

² Ibid, page 141.

³ Ibid, page 141. While not a direct quote the notion is taken from Dr. Lange’s writing.

How then are we going to inform the world about HIM? Simply...through the essence of community? The essence of this community is summed up in the most poignant line in our lessons this morning when Jesus asks if there is anything to eat. We hear, "They gave him a piece of broiled fish." (Luke 24:42) They gave Jesus a piece of broiled fish...they fed Jesus!

As we are fed forgiveness and life in bread and wine, we too become food for the "outsider," the lame, the sick, the lost, the challenged, the disenfranchised, and on and on and they in turn become food for us. In the Gospel they feed Jesus the very symbol of the Christian faith. As we go from here...may we share with others not just a symbol of our faith rather...may we feed others with our faith as we are fed...with forgiveness, with consideration, with respect, with grace, and with love.

Our faith is not something we approve, nor ought it be something we narrow and incarcerate in our tombs of perception and recognition...our faith becomes a shared grace and forgiveness that we ourselves are fed and given in the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith is revealed to us, in what it is, ordinary bread and wine...the body of Christ...the community of Christ...recognized when two or more are gathered around it...this community is the food of faith, the food for others...the food that feeds forgiveness and life to all who believe...we are witnesses to these things...the Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed, alleluia...

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.