

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.

Here we are this morning, gathered together on this the Third Sunday of the Eastertide and once again Jesus shows himself...not like Simon Peter does in the boat, but Jesus shows himself today to us in Word and in Sacrament. Look around the sanctuary, we know it's the Eastertide because it is much more ornate than it was...there is much more going on than there was during Lent. One could say our decorations are up for Easter. The smell of the Easter flowers has dissipated and I did see some sorry looking wilted spring flowers still hanging around the other day, nonetheless, all the candles along with the white paraments are still up and our Eastertide is happening as we speak. But what are we celebrating today, two weeks after the day of our Lord's resurrection? How do we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord and what does it mean for our faith? I'm sure there was no big increase of a workload for UPS or FedEx drivers, no rush to the brick-and-mortar stores for gifts, or no rush to exchange Easter gifts. After all, we only have twelve days to celebrate the Lord's birth...and fifty days to celebrate the Lord's resurrection and here we are fourteen days after the resurrection, how are we doing with our Easter celebration? When we consider all of this, I guess the question becomes, what is the climax of Easter? What do we do?

I guess we do what everyone else has done throughout the gospels after the resurrection...some disciples end up in a locked room and we don't know what happened beyond that. Two disciples are disappointed because things didn't happen the way they thought they should, so they decide to head out to Emmaus. But sadly, their disappointment keeps them from recognizing the stranger who joins them on the road. How many times has our disappointment kept us from recognizing Jesus? At the tomb, Jesus asks Mary why she is weeping and she figures him to be the gardener. Was she disappointed as well? Does her disappointment keep her from recognizing Jesus?

The original ending for Mark's gospel has Jesus himself telling his own mother Mary, along with Mary Magdalene, and Salome the wife of Zebedee to go tell others but they are terrified and say nothing to anyone because they are afraid. Perhaps we can identify?

And today, in our appointed Gospel lesson, even after Jesus has risen from the grave, after seeing and recognizing Jesus by the marks of his wounds, even after Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, according to the disciples, they see no bright lights, hear no bells or whistles, no bands of angels or heavenly hosts, so what do they do? They go fishing. And for fisherman who have made a living catching fish, they can't even do that right. Likewise, for us today, we have finished up our week and tomorrow we head into a new week...but today, we sit in the presence of our Lord on this the Third Sunday of the Eastertide, so now what?

What bearing does this Eastertide, or Easter Season have on our lives and on our faith right now? Do we need bells and whistles from Jesus more than Word and Sacrament to see...to believe? Jesus has given his very life to free us from the bondage of sin and death...do we really need more? Do we really understand what that means for us? What has Jesus shown us throughout the forty days of Lent and through Holy Week... that opens our eyes and awakens our faith? How has all of this affected our faith? Is our faith just decorative or is it functional?

A decorative faith would be just what it says, a decoration, an ornament that makes something look better or different than it really is. An ornament or a decoration does change the standard or the ordinary, it just dresses it up but it really doesn't change it. I think we like our decorative faith because it allows us to see the sins of others while we attempt to cover ours up with our decorative righteousness...rather we use our decorative faith to cover up or dress up our true human condition, that we are just dust and to dust we all return. We are all ordinary sinful folks but we decorate our egos and our very souls with a false righteousness and step on others with that righteousness to elevate ourselves.

A functioning faith, on the other hand, is a faith that opens our eyes and our hearts to see our OWN human condition. A functional faith strips away the decorative faith and sees our ordinary condition that says I have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed. A functional faith places us all at the foot of the cross, seeking mercy rather than vengeance and justice. A functioning faith allows us to see and recognize Jesus Christ in the ordinary and every day functions throughout our lives, to see Jesus Christ at the grave asking us, "why are you weeping, whom are you looking for?" A functioning faith enables us to answer, you Lord, we seek your mercy and your grace because we are dead to sin and alive in you. Functioning faith happens when we are disappointed and traveling down that road of despair and hopelessness, but we can recognize our true faith and condition and see that Jesus is the one who is walking with us and offering himself for us when our souls are hungry. A functioning faith sees faith not just in myself, but in others as well. A functioning faith allows our hearts and our minds to recognize the true grace and mercy in Jesus Christ that enters into our locked room of fear and doubt. A functioning faith does not look for the grace of Jesus Christ in the glory but sees Jesus Christ in the ordinary everyday functions of our life and this is the same faith that enables us to extend that same grace to others who are just like us, dust, or sinful human beings in need of God's grace given to us all in Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, through our decorative faith we see our "god" just as we see our decorative faith on our terms...when we want "god" in our lives to make us look better, when we can put our 'god' on display or when we want "god" to deal out a vengeance we call justice. We want our "god" to be helpful but not disruptive. We want a useful "god" to get us whatever we happen to want in our lives and when things don't go our way, our "god" gets put in the back of our closets just like our decorations at the end of the holiday. We believe with our whole heart and soul that God loves *US*, but cares mainly for me and not those who don't look like me, act like me, think like me, love like me, and or vote like me. The Rev. Dr. Robert Jenson, a former professor and theologian at Gettysburg Seminary has said, that you can tell the difference between a true, living God and a false god. A fake noninterventionist god will never surprise you.

But alas, after Easter Sunday is over, we too leave the tomb, and return to our homes and our ordinary routines, and in a sense, we too go fishing. Rather, we go about our lives... and our faith that gathered so many of us together on Easter Sunday morning is also put away along with our Easter baskets and our plastic eggs and we go about our lives.

As we assume Easter concludes after that Sunday, the next day, we then hear in our Gospel lesson that after breakfast Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. Each time Peter responds, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." And after knowing what we know about Peter's behavior, these words seem somewhat empty. And we could argue that Jesus is simply asking three times because

Peter denied Jesus three times, but that for me is too easy, too simple and fits conveniently into our human understandings and paradigms. But Jesus specifically responds to Peter's words with these imperatives, "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep."

Jesus seems to be saying in his response...make your faith functional. Jesus is commissioning Peter to feed and care for others, not just once, not just for ONE Sunday...but for a lifetime...care, feed, tend, the lamb that grows to become the sheep and then continue caring, feeding, and tending...feed the child, care for the adolescent, who like sheep will get lost, will stray, and will even be killed. In other words, our faith functions for a life time and not just when we want it to work or when we notice it working.

There is one thing I want us to recognize in these resurrection appearances that have been in our appointed Gospel lesson over the last couple of weeks, and that is...Jesus comes back and appears to the very disciples and followers who deserted him, abandoned him, and denied him. In the resurrection, Jesus not only rose from the dead, but the living Christ came back not just for them, but for each one of us as well. Just like in the beginning of creation, in the garden, we fall to sin, we hide from God in our shame, and it is God who comes looking for us.

Once again today, we hear that God, through Jesus Christ comes looking for us and as we hear today in the Gospel, he comes and invites us to share a meal. This "grace" of God is the unmerited favor of God toward us. It is the good will of God that goes beyond our deserving. It is the kindness of God toward us, even though we too are disappointing to our Lord and our God in so many ways.¹ And once again despite our decorative pietistic dysfunction we will gather around this Holy Meal and Christ will join us here in this place and call to us and ask, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" If we are then true to our faith and to our hearts we too will answer, "NO"...but our hands will be out and Christ will say to us, "this is my body, this is my blood, take and eat, all of you." And once again, it is in this moment that Jesus tends to us and feeds us by revealing to us God's love and grace...handed to us in bread and wine. It is in this moment Jesus makes God evident... Jesus shows us that God bears the dreadful curse of our sin for our very souls and assures us of the very functional promise of forgiveness and life despite our decorative nature. Come now, all is ready, come and have the breakfast of grace and life with God.

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

¹ Rev. Gregory Fryer, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church New York, New York. In preparation for Easter 3C, May 1, 2019 defined grace in this way. Pastor Fryer's definition in my sermon has been slightly changed to fit into the context of this sermon.