

The Third Sunday of Easter, 15 April 2018
Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church in the City of New York

O God, whose blessed Son did manifest himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open, we pray thee, the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Micah 4:1-4

Acts 4:5-12

1 John 1:1-2:2

Luke 24:36b-48

This year on Easter Day, that most joyous of mornings, the Church did not furnish us with a triumphant story of the Risen Christ bursting forth from the grave. Rather, we heard the original ending of the Gospel of Mark, ending with the two Marys fleeing “from the [empty] tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.” We were left with the task of responding to that story with our own story, with the church’s story, knowing exactly what happened next: that the risen Christ manifested himself to his disciples, showed them that the death of Good Friday was not the end, that death was defeated by love, and that the story continued, and continues still.

On Easter Day I talked about how the community that first received the Gospel of Mark was the community of the resurrection: the “to be continued” after the empty tomb, who knew and met the risen Christ, and who didn’t need the stories of resurrection appearances to believe. They were able to approach the story with from the vantage of knowing the whole story, knowing that despite the actions of the Marys

the story continued, continued in them. I also suggested that we were also the community of the Resurrection because the impact made by the Risen Christ was so transformational that, not having met Jesus in the flesh ourselves, we are able to experience the resurrection in the community he left.

Today's Gospel from Luke comes from another community, one further removed from those original events. It was written perhaps a generation or more later, around AD 100, as the first volume of a two part work, along with the Acts of the Apostles, for consumption by an international audience not necessarily already familiar with the events it relates. In this account, Easter isn't even the midway point of the narrative. Here the shift comes later still with Pentecost, ending the era when Jesus was with them in the flesh and beginning the new era of the Church. Today's Gospel helps us understand the difference between how we experience the resurrection and how it was experienced by the disciples.

Here we have a full blown Resurrection appearance:

[While the disciples were telling how they had seen Jesus risen from the dead,] Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have."

This story is not dissimilar from the account from John about Thomas that we heard

last week. Here, though, there is no seeming rebuke for those who are invited to touch the risen Christ in the flesh. Jesus gives his friends permission to “handle” him and not just see, but feel, him in the flesh, death defeated, love standing before them. This is the privilege of this first age, the privilege of seeing and believing, of touching and believing. In a way, this story is about the people who first heard Mark’s tale. This is not the chance Luke’s readers will have. We will, however, have other ways.

What Jesus does next invites us, and our experience, into the story:

And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

Jesus asks to be fed. So often we think of Jesus as the host of the meal we share. He is, however, just as often our guest. We have the chance to offer something meaningful to God. The Christ, dead and risen, love triumphant infleshed, asks for food, for nourishment, and to share it with his friends. Accepting our hospitality, he eats with his friends and, as well we know from our own experience of breaking bread with

others, in making this meal together with them he becomes even more fully known, more accessible, more real.

In the context of the meal, of eating that piece of broiled fish, he helps his friends make meaning of everything that they have experienced together. He explains, while breaking bread, that everything they saw and did with him, before and after his death, was the work of God reconciling the world to God's self, of salvation history unfolding before them.

While we may not be able to place our hands in Jesus' wounds, we still have access to his risen body, we still can touch it and make it one with our bodies. We, like those first disciples, share the meal in which Jesus is known to us, that Jesus asked us to make, and that Jesus made with his disciples in the days of the Resurrection. In Luke's story we can see in ourselves the community of the Resurrection by recognising how we connect with Jesus in the fellowship of the table and how that fellowship is intimately connected to the Paschal mystery itself in which "the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Luke's resurrection stories, like Mark's abrupt ending, can give us confidence in our own faith. We may not have been there in those hours and days after the Resurrection, we may not have been fortunate enough to touch Jesus' wounds, and yet here we are. We are drawn into fellowship around the Eucharistic table, we share the stories of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, and we experience the Risen Christ in the

meal we share, in the community we make, and in the Love we both receive and return to God, by loving our neighbours as our self. In the Thomas story, Jesus proclaims, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” That’s who we are and we continue the story.

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