

Sermon for 3Easter

April 18, 2021

Who's in Charge?

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

There are a number of things that all of us have come to miss during the pandemic. We miss being in social gatherings. We miss shaking hands with people and hugging them and patting them on the back. We miss being able to stand closer to another person than six feet away. We miss seeing a whole face rather than just eyes over the top of a mask. We miss singing together. We miss sharing a common meal...most especially both elements of the Holy Eucharist. We've discovered that we are social animals...that we need one another in order to remain healthy and whole. For years we Episcopalians have been telling folks that Coffee Hour is the Fourth Sacrament! We love to socialize! We aren't OK with physical separation, particularly from people we love. But we know that when someone we love dies, we are physically separated from them. That's what grief is all about...the physical separation from someone we love. That's why this pandemic has triggered a grief reaction in so many of us. And that's what makes the resurrection of Jesus so powerful. His resurrection reversed that separation. The resurrection goes against every single law of nature that man has discovered. And we are filled with skepticism and doubt and disbelief...as well we should be. We know that resurrection from the dead is not how the laws of the universe work. It's an impossibility. Human beings can't break the laws of nature with any success. The only force that can do that with impunity is the force that created the universe in the first place...and the name we give to that force is God. Only God made the rules and only God can break the rules. At the end of the day, God's in charge. We can appreciate, then, the challenge that Jesus faced as he encountered his disciples after he died and then rose. They knew that looking at a live Jesus was simply not possible. It must be some sort of a trick because everyone knows that being alive again after dying is not possible...and they all knew for a fact that he had died. Most of them witnessed his dying. Coming back to life breaks the most profound rule in the entire scope of the laws of nature. Everyone knows that resurrection from the dead is an impossibility. But there

these disciples were...in the company of the risen Lord. He had joined them in a closed room behind locked doors. He didn't come through the door or a window; he simply materialized among them...wounds and all. And he spoke to them. It was an experience none of them could explain; but it was powerful enough that no one could ignore it or shrug it off either. Jesus gave them a week to talk about it among themselves and to think about it and to try to figure out what had just happened. And then...eight days later...he met with Thomas as the disciples gathered around. While the disciples were trying to make sense out of what they had just experienced, Jesus decided to take a little walk to Emmaus. He caught up with two dejected men that were trudging along on their way home talking about their heartbreak and devastation at the crucifixion of their master and teacher...their Lord. Jesus listened to their conversation and then explained the meaning of some of the stories about the Messiah that were in the Torah. He connected some dots for them. He helped them realize that all they had seen and heard about the events of the death of their master and teacher had all been predicted in the Torah. They weren't sure they believed him, but they felt a little better after they heard this revelation. They had not realized who he was. They thought him to be a stranger. As they approached Emmaus, they asked him to join them for dinner. He did and as he took bread, he blessed it and broke it and gave it to them...and suddenly they recognized him. Before they could say anything to Jesus, he simply vanished from their sight. And they bolted right back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples about their encounter with the risen Jesus. While the two from Emmaus were telling what happened to them, Jesus stood among the disciples and again said to them, "Peace be with you." The disciples were scared to death, but Jesus reassured them by asking them if they had something to eat because he was hungry. Apparitions don't get hungry. Ghosts don't eat. They gave him some broiled fish and he ate. He invited them to touch him. He reminded them that ghosts don't have flesh and bones, but he does. Making reference to 'flesh and bones' is reminiscent of the passage from Genesis when Adam says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" referring to Eve, so this phrase implies a shared humanity or kinship between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus then explained to them that everything that had been written about him in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms had to be fulfilled...and it had been. That's why the crucifixion had taken place. And he told them that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to

all the nations...beginning in Jerusalem, but not limited to the chosen people of God. This is the beginning. This is how the good news of the salvation is shared. God sent Jesus on a mission to salvage the creation...to salvage us. Jesus then sent his disciples out and they told others about Jesus and baptized them into the community of Christians and those newly baptized went out and did likewise. This is how it happens. One person experiences Jesus and tells another who has his or her own experience of Jesus and tells someone else about this powerful experience. God's in charge and God gave Jesus the power. Jesus gave his disciples the power and they went out into the world and gave the power to others who passed it along. These folks Jesus touched who then touched others were made partners with Christ in the salvation of the world...just as you and I are. This invitation to be co-2 creators in the salvation of the world has been passed down from generation to generation for the last 2000 years. That's the mission of the church. It's our job as partners with Jesus and with God in the salvation of the world to tell the Good News of Christ crucified and resurrected to anyone who has ears to hear. That's the whole point of the church which exists to spread the word about Jesus. We come together as the body of Christ on a regular basis to sing praises to God, to hear the scripture that nourishes our minds so that we can understand more completely and then we share a meal at the altar in which Jesus himself comes to us for the nourishment of our souls in the consecrated bread and wine. He is known to us in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is sharing his power...giving it to the disciples to accomplish their mission. Like Moses shared his power with Joshua and Elijah shared his power with Elisha... they were the ones who carried on. Now, we are the ones who carry on...we the baptized ones of Christ's body...we are the ones who are looking for an experience with the risen Christ...we who hope for all that was promised us in the kingdom of God that is to come. We baptized and believing Christians are partners in the salvation of creation. No one and nothing is excluded. Not our enemies nor ones who have lifestyles we disagree with. No one is excluded. God sent Jesus into the world and now Jesus sends his disciples into the world and the disciples send the newly baptized into the world...from generation to generation. We are part of that line of succession from Jesus the king of salvation. The Christian community's evangelical outreach to the world is not an option, but an indispensable component of the divine plan of salvation embedded in Scripture itself. God's in charge. And God's the one who sends us out into the world. The

question is: Do we go? It is here at the revelation of the resurrection where we are able to enter the story. We come with our doubts, confusions, fears and misunderstandings. We, each week, through worship encounter the risen Christ. In the reciting of the scriptures and the preached word we are offered an explanation, proclaiming the good news of what God has done and is doing. We may eat with Christ, breaking the bread of the resurrection in the Eucharist. The Spirit brings enlightenment, opening our hearts and minds, setting our hearts afire. Finally, the exit from the secure cocoon of the congregation should be ours, not Jesus', for Christ has sent us out into the entire world to be witnesses to this amazing news. If you won the lottery, how many people would you tell? My guess would be that you would wind up telling everyone you know and you might include a few strangers as well. Winning the lottery is something that can change your life. Allowing yourself to be touched by the saving grace of Jesus' resurrection can change your life as well. How many people will you tell about an experience with the Christ that changed your life? Perhaps the Episcopalian allusion to Coffee Hour being the fourth sacrament isn't as far off as it sounds. We're social animals. We need one another and we come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread and in the shared meal around the table. In the company of others is when we are touched by Jesus and it will surely change our lives. Just remember: God's in charge!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN