

Luke 24:36b-48

Many years ago a teacher was asking the kids in her fourth grade class to name the person whom they considered the greatest human being alive in the world today and the responses were quick and also quite varied. A little boy spoke up and said, "I think it's Tiger Woods. He's the greatest golfer in the world, ever." A little girl said, "I think it's President Bush because he's the President of the United States and the United States is the greatest country in the world." And yet another little boy said, "I think it's my mom because she takes care of me and my brother." Over and over again, kids cited one celebrity after another and another. But then it was little Donnie's turn.

And without even hesitating, when the teacher asked him the question, he replied, "Well I think it's Jesus Christ because he loves everybody and is always ready to help them." Mrs. Thompson smiled and said, "Well I certainly like your answer Donnie, because I'm a Christian too and I also admire Jesus. But there's one slight thing that's wrong. I said the greatest living person, and of course Jesus lived and died almost two thousand years ago. Do you have another name in mind?" And in wide eye innocence Donnie said, "Oh no, Mrs. Thompson, that's not right at all. Jesus Christ is alive! He lives in me right now!"

The Church has many affirmations... Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary; he performed incredible miracles; he was a profound teacher who embodied the very presence of God. But the affirmation that is perhaps the most important is that Jesus Christ is alive and lives inside the hearts and souls of each and every one of us.

That's the message of Easter. This morning's gospel reading says it clearly: Jesus is standing there. The eleven (minus Judas) are gathered, and Jesus, we get the impression, materializes out of thin air. He bids them peace and then offers his hands and feet as proof that he was the one that had just been nailed to the Roman cross.

That's the scene. It was an absolute impossibility. It was unrealistic. It was not human. And then scripture describes the emotional state of the disciples in realistic terms. It says, "They did not believe it because of joy and amazement." That's a human expression, isn't it? It was just too good to be true.

Let me ask you: Have you ever been involved in something that just went horribly wrong and then it all got turned around suddenly and everything turned out to be all right? That's what's happened here. It was an impossible situation when 11 men gathered to discuss in private their next move. They were frightened and confused. Life seemed to be closing in on them and it was not possible for them to continue their ministry. They were betrayed by one of their own. The crowds had turned against them. Their leader had been executed. They had denied their relationship to him. And any further development of their leader's ideas would almost certainly mean their own deaths. Into this hopeless scene walks a man they never expected to see: Jesus. They were so startled by this event that they feared they were seeing a ghost. The resurrection amazed them, filled them with joy, and turned their lives around. It's an impossible story that positively happened and the evidence of the resurrection is all around us today.

Let me share a couple of things that are amazing to me.

First, the reality of the resurrection amazes me. We are told by the scriptures that when Jesus walked into the room where the disciples had gathered and said, "Peace be

with you” it startled them. They were frightened. It was a ghost. What else could it be? They were not the kind of men who were easily convinced. These were men of common sense, so they doubted. What else could they do? And this is one of the central reasons why the resurrection is a reality. This is a plain story. Simple. To the point. Realistic. Not contrived to try and prove what happened.

Look at some of the other realistic parts of the story. First, they are startled and frightened. Then Jesus tries to calm them down. He invites them to touch him. You can put your hand through a ghost, but you can't put your hand through flesh and blood. They examine the scars in his feet and hands. Secondly, they still don't believe. They are filled with too much amazement and joy. So he tries a different tact. "Do you have anything here to eat?" he asked. This raises a pertinent question: Would a ghost invite himself to dinner? They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he ate it in their presence. Now they are coming around. I guess because they couldn't see the fish going down his throat, they figured he must not be a ghost. Finally, he sits down with them and begins to teach them why everything happened as it did. It was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies. The resurrection is a reality precisely because it is described so simply.

There are many things that amaze us in this world. And I don't know about you, but I still like to be surprised, to see something happen that I didn't think possible. And when something impossible happens, I have to resort to simple explanations. Amazing things need simple explanations. I suppose that's one of the joys of being a Christian. This man Jesus: his life, his teachings, his death, his resurrection, and his promises continue to surprise me. I read his story again and again and I say to myself, "This isn't possible!" How am I going to explain this? And that's when Jesus sits down with his disciples, and he gives a simple explanation. Take a look at verse 46. He tells them; Christ suffered, Christ died, we must repent and receive forgiveness, and one other thing, tell all the nations of the world what you have seen. That's simple isn't it? The resurrection is a reality. It's an impossible thing that positively happened. The simplicity of it convinces me.

Secondly, the reason for the resurrection amazes me. Now what is the reason for the resurrection? The reason it happened was for the forgiveness of sins. That's what Jesus says to his disciples in verse 47. It happened so you and me and everyone else we know might have a new start with our lives. It happened so we might have the chance to start over.

That's Easter. The Risen Lord comes back to life... and assures the disciples that they are forgiven. Peter had denied his Lord three times. All the disciples had forsaken Him. But Christ came back, forgave them, resurrected them. He came back to share with them... He comes today, this morning, to share with you the joy, the encouragement, and the forgiveness of Easter. That's the reason for the resurrection. It sounds impossible but it positively happened for that reason.

It's amazing isn't it that the story of the resurrection is now in your hands. It's yours to use, to reach out with, to pass on to your children and your neighbors. Don't keep it. Don't confine it. The resurrection of Jesus is a message to the nations, an amazing, joyful, impossible story that positively happened. It's a simple story; that's what makes it so real. It is a story of forgiveness; that's why we need to talk about it. It is a story for all nations; that's how far we are to take it. All glory be to God. Amen.