

Easter 3B 2021 In the Twilight Zone St Luke's Anchorage Rev. Anne Harris

Acts 3: 12-19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3: 1-7, Luke 24: 36b- 48

Yesterday was a melancholy day for citizens of the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth, as the Duke of Edinburgh was laid to rest. I wonder if any of you watched the funeral?

The former Bishop of London who knew the Duke well said that Prince Philip was at home with broad church, high church, and low church, but what he really liked was short church! I think that most of us here today are grateful for **any** church at the moment.

The disciples find themselves at a pivotal place in our Gospel reading this morning.

The resurrection has taken place, but the ascension has not yet happened and so the disciples are in a kind of twilight zone between these two events.

Into that zone Jesus appears and disappears. He walks through walls yet his flesh is firm and still shows the wounds of his crucifixion. He is not immediately recognizable to those who have walked with him, yet he is made present and recognizable in the simple act of eating.

The disciples were understandably confused. I am sure that after Jesus' death and resurrection they spent a good bit of time saying "if only."

- If only we could go back to the days when we were walking around the countryside with Jesus and the crowds loved him!
- If only we could turn back the clock and do something to save Jesus from being executed.
- If only we had not denied and deserted him.
- If only we could go to bed and wake up tomorrow and find that all of this was a very bad dream.

I've been there in my life, haven't you?

When times are tough there is often a tendency to look back at the past and see it in glowing terms.

From time to time we all wax nostalgic about the good old days, when things were supposedly so much better, rampant inequalities, and bad plumbing and all.

In the church we look back at the past too. We study what happened to faithful people, and what their lives mean for us. There is nothing wrong with looking to the past, so that we never forget the lessons of history, for it has been said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

Looking back through the events of last week, the world observed some important anniversaries. On the 14th it was the 156th anniversary of the assassination of President Lincoln. On the 15th it was the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. I gleaned these facts from the news, and most of what is reported on the news is negative events – tragedies and disasters. Somehow, this is what we as a nation have come to define as "news". About 90% of what is broadcast nationally is comprised of bad things that have happened, or will happen, or might happen.

Of course we must look back and remember the events of the past, but we must also hold on to the hope of the future. Among the litany of bad events that have happened to us in the past, and intermingled with them, growing up out of the ashes is always a shoot of resurrection growth. Our challenge is to recognize that growth and nurture it to fullness of life. Our task as followers of Jesus is to help those around us to recognize the resurrection in their lives also and to help them nurture their own regrowth.

Because while the disciples were dwelling on the "if only we could have done something to prevent this disaster", they were missing the point.

Without the crucifixion there could have been no resurrection. They could not have saved Jesus, he was saving them! His body had to die, in order to be raised up to a new kind of life, a kind of life that would never suffer death again.

The theologian Lawrence Moore has said, "... God is a God who is inextricably linked to creation by love and a determination to save what has been created... God embraces the body in Jesus (Incarnation) and enters into our world. God becomes *part* of our world. And God does so in order to *save* it by **transforming it into all that it was always intended to be.**"

That is where the great hope of the resurrection lies. We are not yet what we will be, but we live our lives in the hope that we are being transformed into what God **has always intended us to be.**

That the resurrection of Jesus happened is incredibly important to our faith, and that he was resurrected in a new physical body is also of utmost importance. In each of the Gospels that speak of his resurrection, great pains are taken to "prove" that he is a real, flesh- and- blood body after his resurrection. Bodies are important to God. They matter so much that he was willing to become one, to experience what his creation experiences, all the way from birth to death. Bodies matter so much that he demands we take care of ours and those of others – providing food, shelter, health care, and love, in his name.

The resurrection of a physical body proves that God's love is stronger than death. The resurrection proves that out of what seems to be dead and lost forever, new life can spring. Sometimes that sprout of new life is so small that we hardly dare believe in its possibility! We watch it half in fear and half in hope as it grows, tentatively at first, and then more and more strongly into the light of day.

We are people of the resurrection, you and I! We are here to witness to the resurrection that is taking place in our own lives!

Who among us has not been knocked down a time or two in our own lives? But we got up again, didn't we? We trusted that God would bring good out of bad, light out of darkness, and life out of death!

We continue to trust that God is in the process of transforming this world, and us along with it, into all that it was intended to be. And God is asking us to help in this amazing task!

There is a commissioning in the Gospel reading that we heard today. Jesus says to his disciples:

"... repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in (the Messiah's) name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

This is our commission too. In Jesus' name we are to call people to repentance so that their sins may be forgiven. And this commission starts right here, with each one of us. Right here "in Jerusalem" as Jesus says. Right here in Anchorage, KY.

Now "calling people to repentance" sounds rather judgmental doesn't it? But I don't think Jesus meant us to go out and shame people for their sinfulness. I think he means us to go and **show others the new life we have found** and to invite them to join us in being transformed.

If you are thinking that means we have to be living perfect lives in order to be good examples to others, don't be deceived.

We people of the resurrection are certainly not without sin, but we are daily being transformed and growing in God's Spirit, more and more. What we can be is an example of people who, though not perfect, are seeking daily transformation and finding hope in the world. We can, if we make it a habit, open our eyes to see God's work in the world around us, to see things being made new, to see the tiny shoot of resurrection growing into a sturdy tree. We can be witnesses to what God has done and is doing in this world.

So do not be depressed by the bad news that is always available in plentiful supply. As a social media posting put it, "If someone tells you you drink too much coffee, just stop talking to them. You don't need that much negativity in your life!" Limit your exposure to it negativity because, heaven knows, there is always plenty to be worried about, and life is too short to be lived in anxiety and fear.

Many of us here at St Luke's are feeling anxious about the future, right now. As if it was not enough to have just begun a building expansion project, then we were hit by the pandemic, and now as we prepare to send Mother Allison on her way for the next part of her journey, we are wondering about our future leadership. For some, where we are now feels less like the twilight zone and more like a war zone. We feel we are being hit by one round of ammunition after another. But, I urge you, do not let yourself get wound up in the worry and negativity. Jesus said, (Matthew 6:34) "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." He was being pretty realistic, I think. But he knew the toxicity of worry and how easily we can be overcome by it and he also said,

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Jesus was no Pollyanna. He knew that life was often hard, and short. He had plenty to worry about as he faced the last few days of his life. But he did what we can all do. He went to his Father in prayer and poured out his soul to him. And then he got up and calmly went on with his life, trusting that everything would work out according to God's plan.

Now, in this twilight zone we live in, between Christ's ascension and his returning to reign, that is what we can do as well. We can go to God our creator and pray out all of our fears and hopes to God, and then get up and go calmly on with our lives. Then we can search for the signs of resurrection that are all around us, and point them out others. In doing this we will also find renewed hope for ourselves. Amen