

“Unbound”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, KY
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Luke 24:13-35

On Easter Day, we discovered the empty tomb with Mary Magdalene, who mistook Jesus for the gardener. Either her vision was clouded by tears of grief, or Jesus didn’t quite look the same after his resurrection. Last week, Jesus appeared to the disciples in their hideout, somehow entering to greet them with tidings of peace, despite the fact that the doors were locked. John’s gospel seems to suggest that the risen Jesus can move through solid objects, like walls and doors, to get where he needs to be. And today, we hear about Jesus’ encounter with Cleopas and his friend they walked the road toward Emmaus.

It is astonishing that these two disciples could walk and talk with Jesus for such a long without recognizing him. Perhaps because they couldn’t see clearly or think straight, because of how upset they were, though there’s a hint that God prevented them from recognizing Jesus. However, the most remarkable feature of this resurrection story is the great vanishing act Jesus pulls off after blessing and breaking the bread. All three resurrection stories tell us that the Risen Christ can no longer be bound.

Of course, this was not always the case. For thirty-some-odd years, Jesus was bound, as we are, in human form, constrained by the limits of time and space. Jesus was likewise bound by human relationships with his family, his disciples, and his enemies. Jesus was bound to a special mission. He was also bound in ways that are thankfully less familiar to us. He was shackled and crucified, then wrapped tightly in linen and placed in a rocky tomb, bound by death in darkness and apparent defeat.

But the resurrection changed all that. Jesus is no longer bound. The tomb could not hold him. The expectations of his own disciples also failed to bind the Risen Christ. He doesn't even look the way they thought he would. Evidently, resurrection transformed him to the point that even the closest disciples had difficulty recognizing him at first sight. Think of Mary in the garden. Think of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus.

This refusal to be bound, whether by the expectations of others or the physical constraints of reality as we know them, is wonderful news, because the unbound quality of the Risen Christ reveals how we are meant to live as disciples, and it reveals in fuller measure who God is.

First of all, the unbound character of the Risen Christ shows us how a Christian is meant to live. This is not to suggest that somehow we will be able to walk through walls or disappear from dinner without a trace, much as we might like to sometimes. However, being unbound with the Risen Christ means that the expectations that hold us back and the push us down, the expectations of others and those we have for ourselves, have no power over us, especially when those expectations take life instead of give it.

You know what I'm talking about. Those internal standards we feel the need to meet so that we can be worthy and found acceptable. The external demands set by others about how we're meant to look and behave. Now some of these play important and wholesome roles in shaping our identity, but often these standards and demands are unreasonable, unkind, and they can cause great anxiety.

Christians need not be bound by these crippling expectations that assign value according to some arbitrary standard of success or beauty. Our value comes from the

Risen Christ, who went to a lot of trouble, not because we impressed him or because he was trying to impress us, but simply because he loves us for whom we are, warts and all.

The unbound nature of the Risen Christ encourages us to break away from limitations imposed by fear or stale convention. Resurrection is about possibilities, about imagination, about holding fast to a dream or a vision if it's holy and good, no matter how impractical it may seem, no matter how inadequate you might feel. Resurrection thwarts the forces that strive to inhibit the fullest expression of our God-given calling.

What expectations do you or others have that hold you back from an unbounded life with the Risen Christ? Are you too young, too old? Too poor, ill-educated, insecure? Obsessed by fear of failure, or maybe terrified of success? Have you been told for as long as you can remember, "No, you can't. You're not good enough. Nobody wants you." Well, God does want you. You are good enough. You can. And there's nothing be afraid of except fear itself, which is the chief enemy of faith.

The limitations we place on ourselves, or accept from others, are usually so artificial and flimsy they cannot hold up for long against the type of power that brings a dead man back to life. So embrace the resurrection and be transformed by the power of God's love. Live unbound, free from the constraints of indulgence and excess, free from the shackles of fear and inferiority. For you are beloved children of God, and in Christ, all things are possible.

Just as we are unbound by Christ's resurrection, so also God declares through the Risen Christ, "I will not be bound." God will not be trapped by our expectations. God will work in mysterious ways, some of which we understand, either in real time or in

retrospect, some of which will always escape us. God will not be bound to the serve a political ideology or theological doctrine. Nothing can cage God.

God will be free – free from death; free from expectations to act or appear a certain way; free to do as God desires: to act in God’s own good time; to surprise and confuse us. But most of all, God is free to love us or not. Yet the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, makes clear that God has chosen to love us, no matter what.

No matter what you have done in your life. No matter what you’ve left undone. No matter how many people you’ve hurt and betrayed and abandoned. No matter the dark secrets you hide – which, by the way, God already knows about. God loves you. And God isn’t going to stop loving you. Through Jesus, God established a reliable way of turning our lives around through repentance, receiving the liberty of forgiveness, and the grace to life differently.

Throughout the ages, humanity’s given God every excuse imaginable to stop loving us. We’ve killed each other habitually. We killed His only Son. We’ve denied him, tried to manipulate him for our own selfish purposes. We’ve been disobedient and downright rebellious. We’re ruining God’s good creation. Worst of all, many of us don’t pay God much attention until the chips are down, and it’s time to send up an SOS, what I like to call an “emergency flare prayer.” But God keeps on loving us anyway. God will stop at nothing, will watch his own Son die in agony, in the hope that we might respond with a faith that accepts the love that God so desperately wants us to receive.

That’s the really astonishing about these resurrection stories, but we take it for granted all the time. More astonishing than a few disciples who don’t recognize Jesus on

the road to Emmaus. More astonishing than Jesus vanishing without a trace after he blessed and broke the bread. More astonishing than Jesus walking through a wall. More astonishing than anything else we can imagine.

God refuses to be bound. He refuses to stop loving us, because more than anything God wants us unbound from slavery to sin and death, unbound from the things in life that tie us into knots. That's astonishing, and wonderful; a cause for celebration and gratitude if ever there was one. Amen.