



PASTOR GWEN'S SERMON
3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER
"ANTS IN YOUR PANTS"
SUNDAY, MAY 4, 2025

CHRIST IS RISEN. . .HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

"The Easter story is nothing but a myth," Tom's high school science teacher announced to his class a few days before Easter break. "Jesus not only did not rise from the grave," he continued, "but there's no God in heaven who would allow his son to be crucified in the first place."

"Sir, I believe in God," Tom protested. "And I believe in the resurrection."

"Tom you can believe what you wish to, of course," the teacher said, "However, the real world excludes the possibility of miracles like the resurrection. The resurrection is a scientific impossibility. No one who believes in miracles can also respect science."

Then the teacher proposed an experiment. Reaching down into his refrigerator, he produced a raw egg and held it up. "I'm going to drop this egg on the floor," he said. "Gravity will pull it toward the floor so that the egg will most certainly break apart." Looking at Tom with a challenge, he said, "Now Tom, I want you to pray a prayer right now and ask your God to keep this egg from breaking when it hits the floor. If he can do that, then you will have proven your point, and I'll have to admit that there is a God."

After pondering the challenge for a moment, Tom slowly stood up to pray: "Dear Heavenly Father," Tom prayed, "I pray that when my teacher drops the egg, gravity will let it fall and it will break into a hundred pieces. And also, Lord, I pray that when the egg does break, my teacher will have a permanent allergy to eggs. Amen."

After a unison gasp, the class sat in silent expectation. For a moment the teacher did nothing. At last, he looked at Tom and then the egg. Without a word he carefully put the egg back into the refrigerator. "Class dismissed," the teacher said and then he sat down to clear his desk.

This modified story by Don Schultz speaks to the same lessons as our Gospel reading this morning, where Peter and the disciples still had some doubts especially about what will happen next. Remember our text from last week of Doubting Thomas? The teacher in our story must have had some belief in Jesus and the resurrection that he dismissed class and carefully put the egg back in the fridge. Peter and the disciples must have had some belief in the resurrection, also, but not sure confidence of it, just yet. Was it real? And what did it mean for them?

Peter and the other disciples had been visited by the Lord twice before, but it seems by this text they still did not fully understand or believe that he was alive, that Jesus actually rose from the dead. Would you? They were still locked up in the upper room, they were struggling with their doubts, struggling with the appearance of Jesus, struggling with their thoughts of how can this be true. Life was moving way to fast for them. They had spent three years of their life with this wandering preacher, giving up their homes, their security, their comfortable way of life, to live with this preacher from Nazareth who made their life anything but comfortable. They had not even had time to accept his death, now they were told he was alive. Then he, Jesus, came and appeared to them. They talked with them. WOW. Not once, not twice and now we hear about a third time. But was it really him? Could they be dreaming?

No doubt it had been good old impulsive Peter who suggested they go fishing. Peter's idea was saying: let us go back to something we understand, something we know, something we are familiar with. Let us go back to the security of our old job, the security of our families, the security of the familiar. This suggests to us that the disciples might have struggled easier with their doubt under these more familiar surroundings, but yet their lives were still in flux. But maybe just maybe sitting in a fishing boat they could think?

And then Jesus appeared to them at the seashore where He had first called them to be disciples. It was a familiar place as they were doing what they knew best, fishing. Somewhere they could try to wrap their heads around what had just happened to their teacher, their friend, their master.

And now what happens would seem to us to confuse them more. They go fishing at night, as was their custom. Remember that these guys are professional fishermen. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Had they lost their knack for fishing since they had been gone for three years? So probably they were even more upset than when they first went out into the boats. But then, a stranger calls to them to find out if they had caught fish. And we know that the answer is NO. This stranger tells them to put their nets on the right side of the boat. And they do just that!

The catch of fish is not the important part of this story. They obeyed and cast their nets into the sea and caught a whole bunch of fish. 153 fish to be exact. And by the way historians have tried for years to find symbolic value in that number with no success. After the catch of fish, John, the disciple who Jesus loved, recognized the stranger on the shore as Jesus. He tells Peter. And good old impulsive Peter puts his clothes on, jumps into the water and swims to shore. Now why would you put on your clothes and then jump in the water to get them wet? A question for another day. There he finds Jesus who had breakfast waiting for him. There was some fish and bread on the fire and Jesus invites the disciples to join him for breakfast and add some of their fish to the meal. Peter drags the heavy net full of fish to the shore and places some of their fish on the fire and they all sit down and eat with Jesus.

We realize that this meal was very important for these men. And so was the miracle that they just experienced, and it tells us something about Jesus too. These men were making a decision. They

were struggling with the resurrection. In other words, they were struggling with their faith. And in their doubts, Jesus comes to them. He comes to them where they are. He comes to them in the ordinary common task of life, eating breakfast. He meets them there. And do notice, he does not confront them. He does not scold them for returning to something familiar like fishing. He simply accepts them and invites them to share in a miraculous meal.

Similar to the last meal they had together in that upper room. It was a meal of reconciliation. It brought Jesus and the disciples together. Through eating and drinking, the bonds of trust, friendship, belief were made stronger. They did not need to ask if he was really Jesus. They now knew it in their hearts.

Jesus came to these men, fishermen. He did not scold but reconciled himself to them. He came to show them he had risen. He came because he knew they were struggling. He came to them where they were so that he could help them make a choice, a choice to follow him. A choice to catch men instead of fish.

Their faith was renewed in the resurrected Jesus. It was not a myth, but a fact. They believed.

Jesus even gives Peter in our reading today a chance to redeem himself from denying Jesus after the crucifixion. He denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Remember? And Jesus allows Peter to answer His question, "Do you love me?" three times. And Peter responds in the affirmative, that He loves Jesus. And we all know that loving Jesus is needed for Christian discipleship. He is given then a disciples evangelical role to feed the lambs, tend the sheep and feed the sheep. This is a broader emphasis on the kind of care or concern for the followers of Jesus. Peter now is commissioned to the essentials of ministry, love and service to Jesus' lambs and sheep.

I wonder how unlike us were these disciples? We doubt at different times in our faith journey. Maybe we are like Doubting Thomas who has to see it to believe it. Or do we just need to hear it over and over again. Are we like the teacher in the science classroom who only had sort of an idea that God and the resurrected Jesus existed? Or are we like the disciples, having a faith that can be strengthened.

We all have doubts, it is part of being human as we seek and question the truth. Doubt has no physical form; doubt can restrain you more surely than the strongest steel chain. Yet doubt is nothing but a thought and has no power other than the power you give to it. Although doubt can stubbornly hold you back, you can do something even more powerful. You can let go of it entirely. If you simply release it and empty it from your mind, doubt falls away from you and quickly withers into nothing. There is not one single doubt that is permanently attached to you. Any doubt you have is yours by choice.

In the place where doubt once lived, choose instead to hold, and nurture thoughts of positive empowering confidence. With the help of the Holy Spirit, our doubts will vanish, and we will live a more mature faith through Jesus Christ.

Theologian, Fredrick Buechner once said, "Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a god, if you don't have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving."

Don't you just love that. The doubts we have are ants in our pants of faith. My wish for you is that you climb many ant hills and that your faith will be strengthened. AMEN

Christ has risen.... He has risen indeed!