

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

April 18, 2021 – THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Changed—for Good—by the Risen Lord*”

Acts 3:12-19 (Peter testifies that Jesus fulfilled what the prophets foretold)  
Psalm 4 (The Lord does wonders for the faithful and gladdens hearts)  
1 John 3:1-7 (As God's children, we are called from sin to righteousness)  
St. Luke 24:36b-48 (The risen Christ appears and commissions His disciples)

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Reflecting on Christ's Resurrection from the dead, Pastor Stephen Kingsley remarks: “No one person has ever impacted the world as has Jesus. And, of all that is claimed of him, his resurrection from the dead is the greatest of all. Over two billion people in the world today follow the teachings of Jesus in one way or another. Time spent studying the details [of] the historical reports in the Bible of Christ's resurrection and [His] appearances that followed is time well spent.”<sup>1</sup>

I'm glad Rev. Kingsley approves, because this morning we will look at several of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances, to see what they might mean to us. In 1 Corinthians 15:4-8 (NLT), St. Paul lists these as follows: Christ “was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all ... I also saw him.”

On Easter morning, the risen Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, and at first, she does not recognize Him, until He calls her name. Later, when Mary tells the disciples that she has seen the Lord—*alive!*—they did not believe her until He came to them that night, bringing them His unshakeable peace.

Earlier that afternoon, Jesus had appeared to a couple walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a distance of about seven miles. Even though they were *talking about* Jesus, they failed to realize He was walking alongside them, until He opened their minds to the truth of Scripture, and was revealed to them at table in His familiar gesture of breaking the bread.

After Jesus vanishes before their eyes, and the couple races back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples, the risen Lord appears again in *their* midst. Eight days later, the risen Lord appeared to His followers a second time. Thomas, who was not present at Jesus' appearance on Easter night, has difficulty believing that he is truly seeing Christ until Jesus offers His own body as living proof. About two weeks after Easter, the disciples encounter the resurrected Christ on the beach by the Sea of Galilee—and once again, they do not perceive that it is Him, until He directs them to a miraculous catch of fish and feeds them breakfast.

What do these accounts have in common? Time after time, Jesus' followers *just don't get it!* But what about us? Do we get it?

Do we realize that the risen, living Jesus is with us, calling each of us lovingly by name, as He did with Mary Magdalene? Are we able to be open to, and receive the blessed peace Christ offers us, a peace that the world cannot give or take away?

Do we get it, that daily the Lord walks alongside of us—as He did with the disciples on their way to Emmaus—listening to what we have to say, speaking words of wisdom and reassurance to our hearts, opening our minds to the truth of Holy Scripture, and revealing Himself to us in the broken bread of the Eucharist?

Do we take seriously that Jesus offers His wounded Body to us—even as He did to Thomas, that night—so that we might know in the depths of our being His boundless and merciful love for us?

Do we get it, that Jesus is able to guide and direct us in ways far better than we can imagine—as He did with Peter and the fishermen—and that He longs to feed us with spiritual nourishment that will never leave us hungry or thirsty?

If we did “get” it, if we did truly believe Jesus' words in Matthew 28:20, “I am with you always,” how might we live our lives differently?

Really *getting it* that Jesus loves us beyond measure, and that He is there for us and there with us, when no one else can help, comfort, guide, or cheer us, should give us the confidence, strength, and the peace for

which most of us desperately long. But the confidence, strength, and peace that Christ wants us to have through trusting in Him is not just so we can feel better about ourselves, pat ourselves on the back, or go merrily on our way. In each of the four Gospels, at Jesus' final resurrection appearance before His Ascension, our Lord gives His followers an assignment:

- In today's Gospel lesson (Lk. 24:47-48) He says, "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations ... [and] you are witnesses of these things."
- At the end of Matthew (28:19-20), Jesus gives the Great Commission: "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."
- In Mark 16:15, Jesus commands, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."
- John (21:16, 9) concludes with Jesus telling Peter, "Take care of my sheep," and "Follow me!"

Like those first disciples—and later, Jesus' brother James, and the Apostle Paul—we, too, are witnesses to the risen Lord. Although we do not see Him with our eyes, because Christ has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, our hearts and souls recognize and respond to His presence. And as His witnesses, we are both compelled and commanded to share the good news of Jesus' love with all the world—or even, only our tiny little corner of it. We can do this because we have Christ with us, and we have Christ within us, to continually transform and enlighten us.

When Rick and I were courting, the affirmation, acceptance, and love that I showed him literally transfigured him. He looked younger, more handsome, and seemed to literally, *shine*. His co-workers kept asking whether he had lost weight, gotten a tan—or maybe he was sporting a new wardrobe? Rick wanted to tell the whole world about this woman that had changed his life for the better. And isn't that how it should be for those of us who are affirmed, accepted, and loved by Jesus Christ?

When we truly believe that He is with us, in us, and for us, *we* are changed for the better. And as we are transfigured and transformed by His love, we find we have the motivation, the power, and the energy to share that love, and change the world. We begin seeing the difference in our daily lives, if only in small, seemingly insignificant ways ... such as a newfound patience for an annoying neighbor ...

Very few Christians are called to be like Billy Graham, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Saint Mother Teresa. In the old hymn, "There is a balm in Gilead," verse 2 reads: "If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, and say, 'He died for all.'" It's as simple as that: Talk to people about the One who loves you—Jesus. Offer them the same patience, kindness, compassion, and mercy He offers you. Share with them the joy of being a Christian. There was a bumper sticker a few years back: "Christians aren't perfect—just forgiven" That's a mini-sermon you could deliver to a neighbor—or even a stranger!

Be *intentional* about your Christian discipleship, especially when it comes to making decisions. The WWJD—"What Would Jesus Do?" question has gotten a lot of razzing in our postmodern world. But seriously, it's not a bad question to ask yourself. Perhaps an even more important question to ask is, WCIDJ—"What can I do for Jesus?"

Pray for the courage to defend—in a *gentle, reasonable manner*—the moral stances to which you hold. If you wear a cross around your neck and someone compliments it, tell them about the Savior who died upon the real cross for their sins.

By living out Christ's love faithfully and righteously, we show that we know Jesus, and are seeking to serve Him. Our participation with Christ in bringing about God's purposes is to emulate the faith and righteousness we see modeled most perfectly in Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Through the Resurrection of Christ, we are transformed and equipped to proclaim God's healing love and salvation through all we think, say, and do, here and now, in whatever community we anchor ourselves—whether it is our parish, fraternal organization, neighborhood, school, home, office, or family.

**Let us pray:** Lord Jesus, we praise and thank You for being *with* us, and *in* us. May we show with our lives what we believe in our hearts, that we may be worthy servants whom You are pleased to welcome into Your Kingdom. *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Kingsley, *The Easter Answer: What Happened During the Forty Days between Easter and the Ascension* (Brentwood Press, 2009).