

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)
Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

We've moved from Lent to Easter, from death to life, into the season of the resurrection, and yet the world remains remarkably the same. Spring, has sprung, to be sure. Daffodils and tulips are up. Grass is growing. Migrating birds are on the move. Lawn mowers were out yesterday and gardens are being planted.

But in spite of the shift in theme from Lent to the Easter season, and all of the expected seasonal change, there is a lot that has not changed. Wars continue to rage in Ukraine and Gaza. And then last night Iran launched a long-distance drone attack on Israel, after Israel had attacked the Iranian consulate in Syria. It's too soon to say whether this means escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Political dysfunction continues in congress and our hyper-partisan polarization shows no sign of abating as the election campaigns ramp up their efforts. Nationalism and authoritarianism are on the rise and democracy is under threat at home and abroad. We live in an age of fear and doubt, fear of our fellow human beings, doubt in science and in our institutions and leaders, a sense that we are losing control over our lives, worry that the future will not be so bright for our children and grandchildren, and of course fear of death, and doubts about what comes next.

In these ways we are not unlike the disciples in our Gospel reading this morning. Jesus' appearance in the flesh after his crucifixion startles and terrifies them in the midst of their own worries, fears, and doubts. Sure, Jesus had told them all along what was coming. He told them that he was going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, to suffer, and to die, and that he would then rise from the dead. The appearance of Jesus that we read about today is *after* the report of the women about the empty tomb, *after* Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and after his appearance to Peter. And yet, in spite of all these reports that what Jesus told them would happen has actually now happened, the disciples have trouble taking it all in.

Because we know how the story ends, because we've heard it over and over again, it's easy to be critical of the disciples, to say how they *should* have responded to Jesus. There's a long tradition of disparaging Thomas in last week's Gospel for wanting proof of Jesus' resurrection, rather than believing the other disciples' news. We imagine that we would have done better, that we would not have demanded proof like Thomas, that we would have believed Jesus all along. But we really should know better. After all, nothing had changed in the disciples' lives. A week after Jesus' first appearance to them, they were still gathering behind locked doors, still afraid of the Judean authorities, still afraid of the Romans. If Jesus really were alive, if he really *had* conquered the power of death, and sin, and evil, if he really *was* the Messiah, the king, the Son of God, then why hadn't he ridden back into Jerusalem at the head of an army and sent the Romans packing? Why hadn't he deposed the leaders of his own people who had conspired to have him executed? Why hadn't he exacted some kind of revenge on the crowds that turned against him? Is it really so strange that Thomas doubted, or that the disciples in today's Gospel text doubted, even with Jesus standing right in front of them, that they were quicker to believe in ghosts and the power of death than in the promise of life? And do we not continue to have the same struggle two millennia later, when sin, death, and evil still seem to be fully in control of the world, and the gospel can so often seem like an idle tale that is no different from the conspiracy theories that spread and multiply all around us?

And yet, there Jesus was, back from the dead, not as a ghost but alive in the flesh, showing them his hands and feet, bearing the scars of his suffering on his resurrected body, but not bearing a grudge. Jesus *is* alive, and God's kingdom *is* breaking into the world, taking back control from all the forces that defy God and God's good intentions for us and the whole creation. But God will not do this in the way we or the disciples would do it if we had God's power. God is not interested in revenge, or in justice as we typically imagine justice. God is interested rather in healing our broken world. And that happens through reconciliation, through forgiveness that leads to repentance, through a change of heart and mind that leads to a change in how we live our lives.

There is yet more to this story that we sometimes neglect. Jesus does not come back only to demonstrate convincingly that he really is resurrected and alive in the flesh. (That's what his eating the fish was all about, by the way. Ghosts could only appear. They could not eat. So when Jesus eats the fish, he was proving to them that he was not a ghost.) That was still not enough for them. The disciples were still disbelieving even in the midst of their joy after Jesus ate the fish. It is the next thing he does that has even more significance for the disciples and their part in God's ongoing activity in the world, and for ours. After the meal, Jesus "opens their minds to understand the scriptures," to see that the scriptures have been fulfilled in his death and resurrection, and that they will continue to be fulfilled in the proclamation of forgiveness and repentance that will be the disciples' task from here on out. In other words, God has been working in Jesus and the community gathered around him all along, even when they did not notice or believe, and God will continue work in and among them going forward.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, this is what we are all about as the church. It is our central and defining task, our reason for being. Each week we gather on the day of resurrection to re-present the living, resurrected Christ to doubting, distracted, and discouraged disciples. We re-present him in the stories of his life among the first disciples, and in their reaction to his death and resurrection. We also re-present the living, resurrected Christ in tangible form, in the body and blood of Christ shared in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Here is the risen Christ, *for you, with you, in you*, embracing you in his love, his forgiveness, and his peace. Over the cycle of the church year we survey the whole of the scriptures to remind ourselves of how they have been fulfilled in Jesus' life on earth and how they continue to be fulfilled in our lives. And then we are sent out to embody and re-present what we have seen and heard, what we have touched and tasted, and how it is changing our lives. We continue to do this persistently and defiantly even and especially in hard times, when nothing else in the world seems to change, confident that God is faithful even when we are not, that God fulfills God's promises even when we doubt, that ultimately God's good intentions for us and for the world will come to pass, and that even now by the grace of God we are a part of God's healing, reconciling, recreating work.

May we hold fast to our calling as the church to attend to the risen Christ as he continues to appear to us in word and sacrament, in our weekly assemblies and in our daily lives. May the Holy Spirit continue to create in us faith to trust his promises in spite of our doubts, and to witness to the faith that is in us amidst our fears, so that we may share our hope and our joy that Christ is risen, Alleluia! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)