



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

“MORE”
EASTER DAY

ACTS 10:34-43
PSALM 118
1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11
MARK 16:1-8

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY
APRIL 4, 2021

A beloved Uncle of mine died a couple of years ago. In his will he wrote about the next life: “I wish there was something more but I don’t think there is.” This is where the women and the male disciples are on that first Easter morning... I wish there was more life with Jesus but I don’t think there is. It was beautiful while it lasted but it is over. And then....something inexplicable.

What the Bible gives us is a jumbled and varied sequence of appearances of the risen Jesus. We hear the earliest account from Paul today in his letter to the Corinthians. Jesus appears to Cephas (Peter), then the twelve, then to 500 men and women. Then, Paul says, Jesus appeared to Paul – referring to Paul’s Damascus road experience¹. Later, Matthew, Luke and John offer more stories of the risen Jesus: on the road to Emmaus², to the disciples after they return to their old lives and are out fishing³, to the disciples behind closed doors in Jerusalem⁴. Today we hear the earliest *gospel* account from Mark which ends with the shock, amazement and fear of the women. You may see in your Bible a couple more endings that were added on to Mark to tidy things up, but this is the original.

¹ Acts 9

² Luke 24:13ff

³ John 21

⁴ John 20:19ff

Here in Mark the angelic figure says to the women: *Go tell the disciples and Peter....* This sentence is odd. Peter should be listed first as the most prominent disciple. But here Peter is last. May be it is unclear on Easter morning whether Peter is a disciple or not? Maybe *Peter* is unclear whether he is a disciple or not? The last time we have seen Peter is when Peter denies Jesus three times. Peter betrays Jesus completely and when it matters most. Peter has done what he promised Jesus he would never do. It is now three days later; I imagine Peter may still be in hiding, separating himself out of shame from the disciples, unable to get past his past. So the angel says *Tell the disciples and Peter* – **especially** find and tell Peter that there is something more.

“There is more” is a glorious message from the risen Jesus. But the meaning grows when we put Jesus’ Resurrection into his human relationships, as theologians like Rowan Williams, James Alison and Rene Girard have been doing⁵.

Easter morning is God’s response to our betrayal. It is tempting to identify ourselves and humanity entirely with Jesus as victims on the Cross: the sufferings of

⁵ See Rowan Williams’ powerful book: *Resurrection*, and the work of Rene Girard and James Alison on scapegoating.

all the world are on the Cross with Christ. This is true. But it is not the whole truth. It is also true that Christ is *our* victim. We heard the early church speaking in Paul's letter today: *Christ died for our sins*. Only Jesus is ***pure*** victim. Every other human being is complicit in Jesus' death in the sense that every one of us is enmeshed in the world's death-dealing ways. We may do our best, we may be "good people", but we are still caught up in the universal patterns of human relationship in this world: unequal power, racism, ageism, exploitation of others, desecration and despoiling of creation, selfishness, greed. I have been haunted by the image of folks closing doors on the Asian woman beaten and lying on the sidewalk in Hell's Kitchen last week, as I am sure you have too. We have all at some time turned the other way when neighbors needed help, we have all in some way closed doors on those in need, if only from a sense of self-preservation, like Peter. We cannot escape these dynamics, we are born into them and we contribute to them despite our best efforts. We might think of it as original sin. All of us continually betray Jesus and the Kingdom of God he brings.

When the risen Jesus returns to Peter and all the others, Jesus inserts a spoke in the ever-turning wheel of violence and offers humanity something new. Jesus judges judgement. Jesus makes *forgiveness* the foundation of his community. Jesus comes to Peter and all those complicit in his crucifixion. Jesus eats with them and accepts their hospitality, as in the home of the disciples in Emmaus⁶. Jesus doesn't simply say: You are all forgiven. Jesus enacts it. We know from our own experience how forgiveness transforms relationship. With Jesus' forgiveness, the future is a gift and not a burden. Everyone is equally included. The angel says to the women: *Jesus is going ahead of you ... all of you ...including the women, who are the first people to glimpse this new future they don't yet fully understand.*

The early church realizes Jesus' forgiveness is at the heart of Easter life. In Luke, the risen Jesus speaks of *preaching forgiveness of sins* in his name⁷. Forgiveness becomes embedded in the church's sacramental language. Once we start to listen for it, we hear it everywhere. In the Eucharist, Jesus offers the Blood of the New Covenant *for the forgiveness of sins*. Today,

⁶ Luke 24:28ff.

⁷ Luke 24:47

we receive forgiveness as from the hand of the risen Jesus whom we have been complicit in betraying. In the Nicene Creed we confess *one baptism for the forgiveness of sins*. The Creed could have identified some other aspect of baptism as primary; initiation into the Body of Christ. Or baptism as the outward sign of the unity of the Church - *one baptism for the forgiveness of sins* -- all of which is true. Yet from the beginning the church sees that Resurrection and forgiveness are inseparable. For you and me, Resurrection is liberation from the prison of our past. When we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection we are no longer imprisoned in shame, guilt and regret with no way out. We are raised to the freedom of the forgiven children of God.

Jesus passes this holy gift of forgiveness on to the church. *Whatever sins you forgive they are forgiven*⁸, the risen Jesus says in John. The disciples become bearers of Jesus' gift of Divine forgiveness. This is what the church is for - to live this new way of being human that the risen Jesus offers.

Resurrection isn't just for the next life. Resurrection

⁸ John 20:21ff

transforms life now. Transactional relationship, seeing others as objects in a fearful, self-centered prison is not the way we have to live. Because of Easter morning, we can face our failures, complicity and selfishness. These are not the end of our story, as they are not the end of Peter's story. The risen Jesus gathers a community in which we can be a gift to each other. A community where no matter what status the world gives us, we are all forgiven and beloved.

The experience of countless people over 2000 years with the risen Jesus suggests that there is more. More life now; more life to come; more hope than the world sees; more love and grace than the world allows. The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia.

AMEN

THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
487 HUDSON STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEBSITE: WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG

EMAIL: INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG