

4-15 SermonsB18Easter3

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

Last week during the children's message we remembered that we are in the *Season of Easter*. The first couple of Sundays in this Season of Easter we consider Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. On Easter Sunday our gospel reading was taken from the Book of Mark. In Mark Jesus didn't appear to anyone. Last week, Easter Week Two, we read from the Book of John. We heard about Jesus appearing to ten terror stricken disciples then appearing again a week later with ten plus Thomas the "show me" disciple. This week, Easter Week Three, we find ourselves in the Gospel according to St. Luke. The important thing to note here is that we have a *shift in date* and a *shift in audience*.

Scholars generally agree that the Gospel of Mark was written between 66 CE and 70 CE. That's important because that was the time period of successful but short lived Jewish rebellion against Rome. Scholars believe that **Mark** was writing to a *mostly gentile convert audience* ... people who were not Jewish but who had come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. They were waiting for and expecting the return of the Jewish Messiah *in their lifetime*. **John** on the other hand, wrote to the *predominantly Jewish* Johannine Community said to have been located by that time primarily in the area around the Dead Sea. They were *Jews, but they defined themselves as very different from the Jewish community in which they arose*. John's Gospel is dated between 90 CE and 110 CE. **Luke**, like John was written somewhere between 90 CE and 110 CE. Unlike John, Luke addresses a group of *gentile followers of Jesus' Way*. Luke's audience gathered in house churches throughout the Roman Empire sharing the Lord's Supper and passing on the Jesus' teachings. Luke's community spoke Greek not Hebrew. Luke's followers didn't need to be convinced of the resurrection. They were more concerned about what it meant for them.

One important thing of note is that Mark's Gospel was written *before* the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. John and Luke were written *after* the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent scattering of Jews across the territories of the Roman Empire. Judaism was in a

period of intense redefinition, much like Christianity is now. And, Christianity was trying to defining itself apart from both the Jewish world and apart from the Roman world at the same time.

In the Gospel of Luke, like the Gospel of Mark, there is no confirmation of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday for either the women or the eleven disciples. In Luke, two angels, instead of Mark's one, appeared to the women and announced that he had risen as he said he would. Here in Luke though, instead of saying nothing as they did in Mark, the women do go and tell the eleven what they have seen and heard. Peter alone goes to check it out and finds the empty tomb and the linens lying alone without the body. Then, here in Luke, the scene shifts quickly to a road heading west. That road runs through a village named Emmaus. On this road that two dejected followers of Jesus shake their heads in wonder and commiserate about the loss of their hopes with the death of Jesus. Then, they meet a stranger though who accompanies them along the way. The stranger is the risen Christ. They just don't know it yet.. What they do know is that he opens the scriptures to them as they travel down the road. Jesus's identity is revealed to them in the breaking and sharing of bread. The two travelers return to Jerusalem, find the eleven, share their story, and hear the eleven's story of Jesus' appearance to Simon Peter. That is where our reading for today begins. The "they" who "were talking about this" in the Gospel reading today, includes the two from the Emmaus road and the eleven remaining apostles.

Jesus appears to the thirteen of them. Eleven from the inner circle and the two others who were, it seems, were not in the "in crowd."

The Gospel of Luke tells us that they were startled and terrified. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Even though he had told them what had to happen and how it would end up ... even though some had seen the empty tomb and some had met him along the road and recognized him ... they were still frightened ... even though he had told them again and again and again that the Messiah HAD to suffer, die, and rise ... they still could not wrap their minds around it.

We can look back and say, "What foolish followers. How slow to believe. How little you comprehend. How faithless you are in your doubt." But, are we any different? Are we less inclined

to believe in *Theology of the Cross* – a way of suffering ... than *Theology of Glory* – a way of winning ... than they are?

In our lesson for today from 1 John chapter three we hear very clearly that we are winning *Children of God* not losing *Slaves of God* (losers). But, how can that be if we follow Jesus' way? What can being a Child of God – just like Jesus – mean in our lives?

In the Greco-Roman world ... the world in which Christianity arose out of Judaism ... slavery was a way of life. You were either a free person or a slave. You may even have been an educated slave. You may have had a good position, a good employer/owner, a comfortable place to live, and access to amenities that slaves in other cultural contexts would not have had or even dreamed of having. Yet, at any moment your owner could take all of that away. If you failed to perform according to your owners expectations ... if your owner was prone to caprice, suspicion, or malice ... your world could change in an instant. Only as a child of a free person in authority, only as a child born in freedom and born to freedom, could you have any sense of security and privilege in the world. If your world changed in an instant in like manner ... it was because you made that choice yourself.

How little sense it would make to anyone ... Jewish or Roman or Greek ... that a Child of a Freeman, much less a Child of a God, would choose to suffer and die!

No wonder, over and over again, followers and would-be followers of Jesus had such a hard time wrapping their minds around that concept, believing it, and accepting it.

Children of the master of the household. Children of freemen were to be served; they weren't subject to the role of servant. That would be preposterous. Children of the master of the household, children of freemen, meted out punishment; they didn't take it. Children of the master of the household and freemen destroyed lives at a whim; they didn't sacrifice their lives for the benefit of others. The whole Jewish, Roman, and Greek world ... the whole western world with all its ways and all its values knew the game. And the game was turned end over end by the teachings of this one, this Jesus, who defied death and rose from the grave!

This wasn't just a matter of accepting a historical fact ... that someone named Jesus died and rose again. This was a matter of acknowledging that there is an entirely different way of living *in* the world and living *of* God ... as a Child of God and not as a Child of the World.

If the disciples were slow on the uptake of it all ... no wonder. They had very good reason! They had a lot to lose ... nothing short of the prevailing world view.

It is extremely interesting and telling that over the course of say seventy or eighty years people of all kinds chose Jesus' way. They came to embrace Jesus and his way from across such a wide variety of economic and cultural life circumstances ... rich and poor ... from a range of religious beliefs ... Jew and Gentile ... from a diverse political orientations those with allegiance to Rome and those who abhorred Rome. Clearly something was missing for all of them. Clearly some things weren't making sense anymore ... some things didn't seem just, and right, and fair anymore ... some things that used to provide hope and promise now fell short and disappointed. The world wasn't lining up in ways that made for health and sense and wholeness for individuals and families and clans and nations anymore. And, in the midst of all that wasn't making sense around them ... the absolutely *world defying non-sensible* ways of Jesus Christ ... began to make more sense than everything else that people had counted on before.

The beautiful irony of this time in the formation of the church is that both those who owned slaves and those who *were* slaves realized that they were missing something without full communion and full community with one another. We don't see this in the Gospels so much as we see it in the letters written by St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, the author of Hebrews, and St. John. We are ***all*** Children of God long as we have love for one another St. John writes. We are ***all*** heirs of the Kingdom of God insofar as we abide in right relationship and love for one another and God ... so long as we live with a spirit of universal love ... agape self-sacrificing love ... and universal acceptance of one another as equally guilty and equally innocent before God we are one family.

It's interesting to note that word, TEKNON, the word for the children of the family, like many other words, has two sides to it's meaning and connotation. On the one side the word TEKNON implies

affection and reciprocal relationship formed in bonds of love and trust. It implies being precious and nurtured, protected and guarded. On the other side, TEKNON implies paying a price, being punished, and being legitimately held to account when required. Any responsible parent knows both sides of the TEKNON coin. Jesus tells us and Jesus shows us that our identity as a Child of God involves both loss and gain ... both affection and accountability.

Will we, as the thirteen were that day, be startled, terrified, disbelieving, and wondering ... if ... as a Child of God ... the gain and the affection will be surpass the accountability and the loss? Will we be willing to live each day more fully into our identity as beloved children not knowing exactly how the balance sheet is reconciled in the Kingdom of God? Will we reach out and lay hold of the every day opportunities to live life ever more fully in Christ trusting that in doing so our inheritance as Children of God will surpass all we know in the world and all we can imagine as a Child of this World?

And, will we witness to the crazy upside down and inside out world of Children of God and Brothers and Sisters of Christ with joy and awe?

Some one thousand and nine hundred years ago thirteen slightly terrified, amazed and awestruck followers decided they were "all in" despite the crazy odds. And, look how that turned out. Go figure.

(As you are willing and able, please pray with me....)

Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer, Teacher, Son of God, Help us see that whatever we relinquish in this world is nothing compared to the wonder and blessing beyond imagining that we share in you.
AMEN