

Sermon, St. Davids, Third Sunday of Easter, 4/11/2024 I John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

In this 50-day season of Easter, we have various beautiful scenes of Jesus following his glorious resurrection. Today's story from Luke, which takes place after his walk on the road to Emmaus, emphasizes that Jesus' resurrection is bodily. The disciples were initially afraid, believing that they were seeing a ghost. Jesus immediately disabuses them of this. He says, "Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

What do you believe about the resurrection? Do you envision Jesus as some kind of spirit? Have you ever seen or felt any spirits or ghosts? That is not what happened on that first Easter Sunday. Jesus was flesh and blood, like us, with wounds from his crucifixion. He was back to life after defeating death. And he famously tells them that he's hungry. Because he's human, and humans get hungry. Maybe some of you are hungry right now. Soon we will feast on sacramental bread and wine, and then we will have coffee hour, with coffee, tea, and treats.

Jesus was hungry, so they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it in front of them. Ghosts don't have flesh and bones or digestive systems. This is one of my favorite resurrection scenes with Jesus: him being hungry and having a piece of fish. I imagine them watching him consume that fish, their fear fading away a little with each bite. Their joy seeping in. Realizing that this was the Lord, not a ghost. He had died, yet here he was, eating in front of them. Then he explained to them how this was all fulfillment of the scriptures. "You are witnesses of these things," he tells them.

Witnesses. That's such a sacred word. When we come together for a wedding, for example, we witness and bless two people becoming one. And during baptisms we are witnesses who make vows to and about the new Christian.

What other ways are we witnesses? What does the word make you think of?

We can live our lives in ways that witness to others about our faith. Episcopalians generally aren't known for knocking on doors and "witnessing" when the door is opened. Perhaps we're more aligned with the sentiment sometimes attributed to St. Francis, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."

Are you living your life in a way that you are preaching the Gospel at all times? If not, what changes might you make?

This Third Sunday of Easter also includes readings from the first letter of John. The three Johannine epistles are the most beautiful epistles in the Bible in my opinion, and I probably think that because I had to translate them in a Greek class in seminary. Spending time translating always made me feel closer to the text.

But this passage is beautiful no matter who translates it. Listen to the first part of today's reading again: "see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are."

We are children of God. More than 25 years ago, I attended a recovery meeting where a woman consistently introduced herself as "Hi, I'm Amy, child of God and alcoholic." At the time I attended those meetings I was not going to church, and her identification of herself as a child of God interested me. And all these years later I still think of her when I read this passage.

We are all children of God. Do you embrace that about yourself? Do you feel unworthy of such a designation?

I feel unworthy, but I also know that Jesus has made us all worthy. God loves us, and we are children of God. Sometimes I am able to embrace all of that love.

Being children of God isn't the end. We're called to live and move in the world in such a way that we show to others that we are children of God. We're called to witness, with our actions if not with our words. So many of you already do this so well, and I have been inspired by your Christian witness for as long as I have worked here. Even a little longer, back when I met you and was interviewing to become the rector.

One of the gifts of being as sick as I am is seeing you all act as the children of God you are as you care for me: leaving salted caramel chocolates on my front steps. Texts checking in. The pastoral care here without me is in good shape, and I am so grateful. I hope that others in the congregation get the same attention and love. I know that Connie did, after her car died Wednesday morning and Candy drove to Hopewell to bring her to church. And I did not fully recognize what a fine and caring Christian man my spouse is until I got sick and witnessed all the ways he cares for me, including taking over feeding and walking my insane and spoiled mutt Pepper. I must get stronger soon so that he doesn't have to keep dealing with her. I think taking care of her is harder than flushing my PICC line or making sure I say on the middle level of our house all day long, fetching things for me constantly that are in the basement or upstairs. But Gary preaches the gospel to me every day, without using words.

So on this third Sunday of the glorious season of Easter, I hope that we can all remember that we are children of God, called to live our lives differently because we are children of God. And we worship a god who became fully human in Jesus, who when he appeared to his frightened disciples convinced them that he was not a ghost not only by inviting them to touch his wounds, as he did with Thomas in last week's reading, but by eating a broiled fish.

How will you honor Jesus this week? How can you act like the child of God that you are?