

Second Sunday of Easter – Year A
April 19, 2020
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- SERMON -

Well, this is my first sermon where there are a lot of empty seats here, and I'm looking out at this camera and I know you're all out there! If I *could* see you, I'm sure some of you are probably in your robes or pajamas. Some are sitting in your favorite chair, some at the dining table. Maybe sipping on a cup of tea or coffee. But, in effect, you *are* still here. Watching. Listening. Participating.

One thing about starting something new, have you noticed some things you may have taken for granted before? Like little things. Do you find yourself grateful for little things? I know I have.

And there may be a lot of us who are getting in touch with some things inside of ourselves, *maybe more than we want*, like maybe I just don't *want* to be alone with myself anymore. One of the things you have to get used to is the contrast, right?

I will say, emails & comments from the services over the last few weeks tell us that, even though we don't see you physically, God is still at work. And in some cases, God is doing the most when we are seeing the least. God's hand is still moving, God is working in your lives. We -- here in this sanctuary -- may not see the expressions on your faces, the smiles, the nods, the body language that says, "Yes, Lord!" But there's a song that says, "Even when I don't see it, you're working. Even when I don't feel it, you're working." We can know that, even when I see the least, feel the least, know the least, He's working!

These are the spaces that God creates for revelation of who he is.

How would I know He's a way maker, if I never needed a way made? How would I know He's a provider if I never had a need? How would I know He is resurrection, if I didn't experience death?

So, I'm learning how sometimes we have to see in our spirit what we cannot sense.

We read this morning about two disciples who were walking to Emmaus three days after Jesus was crucified. And, without allowing them to recognize him, Jesus started walking alongside of them and he asked them what they were discussing together as they walked along?

They stood still, with their faces downcast, and said "About Jesus of Nazareth." They explained that "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed - before God and all the people. We had

hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. But the chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to *death*, and they *crucified* him!!!”

Can't you hear it? They're saying, "Oh, No!" "No!" This can't be! No, No, NO! This is NOT how it was supposed to go!! This is terrible!

...And, yes, it was...

How many moms, dads and grandparents, when you heard they were cancelling school said, "Oh, No!" "No, No, No!" "This is NOTs how it was supposed to go!!

How many of you when you met with your financial advisor or clicked on your account said, "Oh, No!" "This can't be!!!

And then the disciples tell this man who is walking along with them, "And now some of our women went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told US that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was ALIVE. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but THEY didn't see Jesus either!"

What does all this mean? This is crazy!!

And, just to set this up for you, these disciples woke up to a different world than the one they had gone to sleep in just three days before. If you've ever woken up to a different world than the one you went to sleep in, you understand that it creates an impulse – some people call it fear, or we can just call it 'humanity'.

They were scared. And what they really needed at that moment was comfort. They needed to understand why this was all happening the way it was. They needed someone to make sense of it all.

So, what does Jesus do? He said, "Did not the Messiah *have* to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he *explained* to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

And later, when they sat together at dinner and he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them, He opened their eyes and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. It was like the lens in their eyes had flipped to a new lens. They were able to see what had been there all along -- Jesus, the risen Lord.

In both our Old Testament and New Testament readings this morning we read, "You must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

Our Lord loved them, he knew what they needed, and filled their need. He opened their eyes.

Those of you sitting out there watching this, may want to say, “Open my eyes, Lord.” I don’t understand what’s happening. Yes, there does seem to be some improvement, but this is just going on so long... “Open my eyes.”

There are many verses we could read to help us through situations, that say how God is more powerful than the enemy, “No weapon formed against us shall prosper,” and “the Lord is a stronghold in times of trouble”, but sometimes when you’re in a real situation or circumstance, these really may not comfort you very much.

I heard a minister tell a story recently of when his little girl had come to him one night saying she heard something that scared her and afraid something was in her bathroom, and he held her and said, “Nothing’s in your bathroom. And besides, even if it is, you’re here with me now.” After a bit she said, “I know, Daddy, but I’m still scared.”

While it’s easy to quote scriptures like, “Don’t be afraid”, right now we’re having a hard time dealing with this virus. And these disciples had just lost the one they thought would be the Messiah, the one who was going to redeem Israel.

They might say, “I went to sleep, we had a Messiah, I woke up and he was dead.” Or, “I went to sleep, I had a job, I woke up, I didn’t.” “I went to sleep and things were well, I woke up to a different world.”

So many times Jesus had told them, “Don’t be afraid”.

So when things are going so very wrong, and we’re scared, and we ask, “What do we do?” And Jesus says, “Don’t” – Not answering “do -- thus and such” but the first thing he says many times is, “Don’t. Don’t be afraid.” That’s the first thing we are to DO – is DON’T. Sometimes what we DON’T do in a certain season is even more important than what we DO.

So, when the disciples wonder what does this new world that they woke up to mean, Jesus gives them reason to NOT fear.

So, we can say, I’m not afraid, I’m not afraid – but, I’m still scared. We *do* follow the guidance given as far as wearing masks, social distancing, stay home unless you HAVE to go somewhere, but what I *don’t* do is, I don’t stop worshipping. I don’t stop believing, I don’t give in to this fear.

I’m sure there are many lessons we will learn because of what we’re going through as a society, but perhaps one of the lessons God is trying to get us to learn right now is that, sometimes what we can’t see is more important than what we can see.

I can’t see you right now, but there is evidence that God is at work in your lives, both in you and through you. God is at work many times in ways that we cannot see, because we are looking through a different lens. -- They were afraid. They didn’t know what to do. But when Jesus allowed them to see through the lens of faith, they saw him, alive, resurrected. He had been with

them the whole time. Walking with them. Teaching them. Present with them. They were NOT alone.

One of the lessons we learn from today's gospel is that faith is a lens. A way of seeing your situation. Sometimes faith changes the situation, sometimes faith changes the way you see the situation. Sometimes God changes IT, sometimes he changes ME.

These disciples' fear and concern were changed by what they saw. When your vision of who God is gets obscured by what you're going through, something very small can block out something much bigger.

This virus, something so small, is affecting the world. But we should NOT allow it to get in the way of what God wants us to see. If I were to take this iPhone, which is small, and walk over to the camera and hold it up to the camera lens, even though it is very small, all you would be able to see would be the iPhone. That would be your whole focus. You wouldn't be able to see everything else that the camera lens has available to see, what's there. You could only see this very small thing that taken up your view. But God's calling is bigger than any crisis.

When we are in turmoil, when we are scared, wondering what is going to happen, what am I to do? I hate this quarantine! I feel so alone. I lost my job. What do I do now? A friend or loved one is in the hospital or assisted living facility and I can't visit them. Help me, Lord. What's happening? **Where is God in all of this?!**

Know that he is right there. Right in the middle of it. He *hasn't* gone anywhere. He has been there the whole time. He's with you right now.

In our readings this morning we were reminded of when God said to "...love your neighbor as yourself." God loves you and is right there, in your presence right now. Wherever you are.

When the two disciples saw and recognized Jesus alive, they went immediately to tell the others. To share the good news, the Gospel of the risen savior.

God is changing our focus, and one of the very best things we can do in this season is to continue to move the gospel forward. The good news of God's love, and to show his love to others.

Using the lens of faith, look for God's presence in the actions of anyone doing anything that looks like "loving a neighbor". And then, like the disciples, how are we being the presence of our God by loving our neighbors?

And while we ask God, "What do I do?" Ask God what he can do *through* you. Many of you have already made that move and others are being blessed in many ways because of it. Thank you so very much if that is you. And even if that is you and you have already been a blessing to others, maybe there's something else you can do. Ask him what that might be.

God's calling is more important than this virus. Look through the lens of faith that shows where you can be a blessing, even if you're sitting at home. You might be surprised at what you see...

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