

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

April 26, 2009

Easter 3B 2009

In the Name of our ever present, ever surprising, ever living God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Sunday readings during the Great Fifty Days of Easter are devoted to seeking to understand the meaning of Easter, of the Resurrection of Jesus into the Risen Christ. The first moments of Easter were difficult for Jesus' followers. They were in a state of disbelief, of grief, of fear and, in their more lucid moments, they were probably asking themselves, "What happens now? What do I do next?" Here, the disciples Christ had met on the road to Emmaus had returned to tell the other disciples that the Lord had risen. And into this confused scene enters the Risen Christ. He notes their fear and amazement and at first he tries reasoning with them: Look at my hands and feet – don't you see? Touch me – don't you feel. Seeing that this wasn't getting him very far, he asks, "Say do you have anything around here to eat?" What Jesus did was get them out of their heads into their bodies and the real world. "The man's hungry!" Now - that - they could understand.

Easter is hard for us to understand also. We, too, try to wrap our minds around it and fail. Not because it is new to us. No. Unlike the Apostles, we have heard the story all our lives. Perhaps many of us know the story too well and locate it in the only context we know – in church on a spring Sunday morning once each year. As a culture, we do with Easter what we do with Christmas: We anticipate it, then

celebrate it with church services, a gathering of friends and family and with a good meal – and then we pack it up and put it on a shelf until next year.

We anchor these events in our human calendar but Luke anchors them firmly in the life of God and in God's relationship with Creation. Our Gospel this Sunday is from the closing of Luke's Gospel and the closing cannot be separated from its beginning. Both the opening and closing of Luke are like parentheses – the story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth is firmly set in the story of God's relationship with God's Creation. Luke ties the birth of Jesus with the history of Israel and God's dealings with God's people for thousands of years before. Here at the ending of Luke's Gospel, Luke again ties Jesus to an understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and he opens the disciples' minds to understand them. But it doesn't end there. Luke speaks now of the future – of the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations beginning now from Jerusalem.

The story continues. New chapters of God's redeeming love and faithfulness are on the horizon and we are part of them. Jesus tell the disciples – and that include us – “You are witnesses of these things.” Where have we seen the Risen Jesus that we may witness to the Christ? I think we have to get out of our heads and into our lives, into our real life experiences. Where have we experienced the forgiveness, love and compassion of Jesus in our lives and the lives of others we know? Some of us may have experienced this directly. Other times we see it happening in the lives of others. We may have experienced it through the loving care of others in our lives done in the name of Christ. Luke doesn't end the story of Jesus with the Resurrection and Ascension, he tells us to wait for the power because the Risen Jesus is here now.

About 15 years ago in New Jersey, long before I thought of going to seminary, I was a lay Eucharistic minister and I was bringing communion after church to a homebound parishioner. As I was leaving with the communion kit, a friend asked if I'd use his car and drop his 2 year old daughter off on my way. Heading to the car, 90 year old Arthur asks if I could drop him off at the retirement complex. At the car, I put the communion kit on the roof as I buckle the 2 year old in the car seat. As I finish that, I see 90 year old Arthur trying to get in the car that is on a hillside. I get him settled and we take off. After I drop everyone off, I realize the communion kit is gone. I had left it on the car roof! Feeling terrible, I apologetically tell the priest what happened. "Well," he said, "there are a lot worse things than Jesus being on the loose in Maplewood!"

Today's Gospel and that story are not unrelated to what we are about to do. Sugar Hegelien Carroll was baptized in this Church and raised in Lahaina. Now she and her husband Bobby are bringing their daughters from Anchorage to this same church to be baptized into the life of the Risen Christ. They are giving their children a great gift of community and a new identity – Child of God. Through Christ, they bring them into the very life of God. Bobby and Sugar will teach the girls the stories. They will take them to St. Mary's in Anchorage where they will be nurtured in a Christian community. And through that process, years from now when many of us may be gone, people will still know that Jesus is alive and on the loose in Alaska or wherever life takes them.

So let's make some Christians!

Amen.