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Church of the Resurrection  
May 18, 2025

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

### **Year C**

Acts 11:1-18

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

Psalm 148

I have seen the Lord! We have seen the Lord!

We hear these words in the Eastertide Gospels from those who directly experienced the risen Lord after the resurrection. We see how their lives are changed, sometimes slowly, and continually evolving after that experience.

The Rev. Joseph Yoo, an Episcopal priest, offers insights about the different ways that the apostles react in their lives after seeing the Lord. Rev. Yoo asks the question, “How has experiencing Jesus’ resurrection changed the way the apostles acted, particularly when they were huddled in the upper room in fear?

He then goes on to ask, “How has experiencing the resurrected Jesus changed the way you live?”

That question keeps resonating with me as I’ve looked around and considered what is happening in our nation, the world, and in the wider church. The question I ask us to consider is “How do we demonstrate the impact of Jesus’ resurrection--of the living Jesus--in our individual behaviors, our community’s actions, and in the ways we bring that impact into the world?”

Jesus makes it clear to his apostles and to us how we, as his followers, are to live in the world. Love is the very ground of our being. If we are confused about how to live from that love, and the **boundless** nature of that love, Jesus’ ministry has also made it clear, we observe and learn through Jesus’ life and ministry. If the disciples or we have questions, Jesus’ gives us his command to love one another as he has loved us.

Sometimes, however, we need our own understanding to be questioned, stretched, and deepened through experience and the power of the Holy Spirit. We also may need ways of being reminded which go beyond our usual ways of learning.

In Acts, we see the ways in which the disciples carry out Jesus’ message in the world. Peter, who has been away from Jerusalem, where the community of Jesus’ followers was centered, experiences an opening of his own understanding of resurrection life. In today’s reading from Acts, Peter is recounting the vision he had about being invited to and eating at the home of Cornelius, a centurion, a Gentile. Peter has already heard that the Gentiles wanted to be baptized and follow Jesus. This was controversial because the followers of Jesus were primarily circumcised Jews who followed the laws, including those of food

purity. They expected that the Gentiles would be circumcised and follow all of the Jewish laws and customs as a step toward their baptism.

Peter's vision, as he recounts it, is vivid and filled with imagery. It seems as though perhaps Peter is unclear about the message or is afraid of how he is expected to respond to the vision. He sees the same imagery three times and needs to hear the voice of God before he truly understands what the message is.

When Peter returns to Jerusalem, to the city where Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, Peter must explain to the community why he decided to violate the group's norms. These norms, which had helped Jews survive captivity, exile, and the ongoing oppression of the Roman empire. These norms had formed them as a community, distinct from the others around them. Peter had to confront and explain what made him cross the boundaries between "us" and "them."

With this vision, Peter realized that Jesus had not differentiated between Jews and Gentiles when he fed the crowds. Jesus didn't question who deserved healing and who didn't. Jesus didn't categorize people into "us" and "them." He didn't withhold the love of God and promise of new life from those who came from other regions or from across the sea. Jesus offered love, freedom, and hope to everyone. Jesus spoke truth, even when it would disrupt the empire or the religious leaders. Jesus was very clear.

Love everyone.

He knew, however, that the disciples and we would falter, finding it difficult to stand up to the secular and religious authorities. The disciples would have to be stretched in their understanding of how fully open Jesus' love is. They would need support to break down the barriers they constructed, and the ones constructed by the world. Jesus does leave them but does not leave them alone. He sends them the Advocate, the Spirit that teaches and nudges, who shows up when we least expect her to and moves us into living a resurrected life we least expect.

Through the work of the Spirit, Peter has the courage to speak about his experience and to share his understanding that God desired all people, to come together to **be** love to each other as Jesus had loved. Those around Peter, inspired by the Spirit, agree with Peter's new understanding. They move from "in" and "out" thinking, from fear to freedom. They understand that God's promise of repentance that leads to new life is for everyone. And this new awareness culminates in praise for God.

What does it mean for us to live the life of love? How can this story from Acts help us be open to the reality of Jesus living in our midst?

What does it mean for our call in this world where people choose fear over love, oppression for those considered "them" based on their skin color, their nationality, whom they love, or how they worship?

Peter's offers us reminders of Jesus' desire to be in relationship with us and to continue to teach us. Personally, I often ask God for skywriting when I'm faced with a dilemma or a big

question about how to be open. That has never happened. But other ways of hearing from God often do happen. Within our parish, sharing ideas about where God is calling Church of the Resurrection next, talking about how we can be engaged in co-creating the world that God intends are ways that the Spirit may speak to us. Perhaps you have dreams and visions or daydreams and ideas for where we are being called. Listen and understand that sharing those with others is a way to help deepen the understanding that each of us has about what it means to follow Jesus.

Listening to the risen Jesus and following what he is saying is risky. Another deacon said to me recently that Episcopalians love to discuss the Holy Spirit but are often afraid of where the Spirit will lead us. Jesus told us that our lives as his followers will require risks of all sorts. Peter knew that, but didn't succumb to fear. The Holy Spirit supports and emboldens Peter as the Spirit does for us.

Our presiding bishop, guided by the Holy Spirit, said recently, that we as a church are so committed to following Jesus that we are standing in the truth that Jesus proclaimed. The Episcopal Church is giving up millions of dollars as our church confronts the barriers erected by the government to keep vetted, long-approved refugees out of the country while allowing those not meeting the refugee criteria to enter.

Be open to listening to others outside of our community and inside. Peter not only listened to the voice in his vision but also to the voices of Cornelius and the Gentiles. His truth-telling about his vision allowed other members of his community to hear his God's voice and live into the vision of a world where all are welcome at the table.

I invite you to share your Spirit nudges and daydreams, your understanding of the risks that Jesus is calling us to take and your fears.

How will we participate in converting fear to love and in dissolving the world's boundaries which label some people "us" and others "them?"

How might we listen to each other's deepening understanding of where you and where we are called to be in this sharing of resurrection life and love?

As we undertake these explorations together, knowing that the Spirit will work through and be with us, be open to God's transformation that will take place in you so that you are able to proclaim through words and actions. "I have seen the Lord."

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Yoo, J. *Thomas' Unfair Label*. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1028500442046329>.