

Sunday April 14, 2024

Acts 3: 12-19 Psalm 4 1 John 3: 1-7 Luke 24: 36b-48

Jay was not a church going guy- they say that people who are geniuses in the left brain see the world in black and white. Cause and proof. That was Jay. Proof for the existence of Jesus let alone the subliminal notion of a trinitarian God or just the notion of spirituality – well Jay’s mathematical mindset needed concrete proof and you all know there is not always concrete proof that God Exists.

But in the remaining months of his young life when Jay knew he was going to die, Jay telephoned the minister of the nearby Presbyterian church where his children had attended growing up years in summer camps, Sunday school and service work trips. (pause)

Jay’s faith journey continued... Those weekly and in his last month , daily visits, the minister arrived bringing Jesus. Whispered confessions, questions about forgiveness, all answered by the warm touch from the minister’s hand in compassion, prayer and in love. Jesus appeared and forgave where no forgiveness was needed. Jesus loved. And when the minister feed Jay and all of us the bread and wine, **Yes, I believe Jesus was there.**

Appearances of Jesus. During this season of Eastertide, it is all about the appearances of Jesus to his disciples. Last week we heard from Rev. Jon the story of Thomas... Jesus suddenly appearing in the locked room, and showing the disciples the crucifixion markson his hands and feet... But Thomas missed all this... and a week later Jesus invites Thomas to touch and feel his wounds. “My Lord, my God.” **Yes, Jesus was there.**

There is another appearance story in John I quite like... the fire on the beach that Jesus has started and the disciples see when they land their boats on the shore. And when asked, Peter climbs back in the boat and hauls to shore 153 large fish for Jesus to cook. And when Jesus invites them, “Come and have breakfast,” But the disciples did not say, “Who are you,” It was in the breaking of the bread that they knew it was the Lord. **Yes, Jesus was there.**

And this morning we just heard from the gospel of Luke. But can we please jump back to the preceding passages and we are on the road to Emmaus. Let me set

the scene- in case you forgot. Cleopas and the other are good gossiping about Jesus and what has happened in Jerusalem. Well you know my vivid imagination... I think they were whispering to one another- talking excitedly about the extraordinary events and suddenly someone appears behind them and asks “what are ya’ll talking about...” Not recognizing Jesus until they invite him to eat. It is then that they recognize who the stranger is... when Jesus breaks the bread. **Yes Jesus was there.**

So the point of all of this, the point of Eastertide, I think, when and if we can *recognize Jesus is amongst us* in unexpected places and in unexpected people our faith is renewed and changed. I admit with humility, I am skeptical at times. But then completely unexpectedly 3 weeks ago ...

I realized immediately it was Bishop Carl. We had met in Jerusalem. Once robust and strong, Bishop Carl now walked with a cane, but dressed in his purple shirt and collar, Bishop Carl carefully walked over to the vacant chair and sat down with us in worship at the View. I went over to greet him with a hug, and he told me it was the first worship service he had been able to attend in months. But it was not our time together in Jerusalem that filled my memory at that moment, it was a vivid memory of Bishop Carl playing the grand piano in the meeting room at Virginia Theological Seminary a few years ago... NO! not just playing BUT the filling Scott Lounge with the music of Beethoven or was it Mozart. It doesn’t matter- what matters is way his fingers glided and danced over the keyboard- and his face looking outward in thought- no music book- and here he was in worship at the View for the first time in long time.

When the service ended and I was packing up my things, I failed to see that Bishop had walked over to the piano. There he was, once again - no music book to follow the notes, no – Bishop Carl just started to play “When I surveyed the wonderous cross” filling the room. The residents sat and listened with me- slowly we began to sing. I did not expect this moment to be an appearance of the Holy. **Jesus was there indeed.**

I believe that when we recognize the presence of Jesus we are changed. And so can we change the world around us? Maybe this is the point that Jesus was saying to his disciples in our gospel today. They were gathered again and Jesus appeared to them- having suffered on the cross and having been abandoned by many. But

Jesus suddenly appears. Not scolding them or admonishing them for their fear. Instead Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” So maybe this appearance story of the resurrected Christ tells us that Jesus is with us not matter who we are, where we are in our walk of life. We are all God’s children and we need to tell the world by our actions that we are all God’s beloved. “Go be witnesses to what you have seen and know. We are God’s people who forgive, are forgiven and love”

Today, right now. This is the Jesus story and it is the bedrock of our Christian faith... Listening to Dean Hollerith’s podcast, The Rev. Jo Owens puts it this way for us today.

“How do our Christian values have power in the world, how can we listen to each other, how can we learn to forgive one another- in your town or forgive someone in your family. Let’s turn the tables.” She said. “Not for how it benefits me but rather how it benefits us – how it can change our world now and in the future.”¹

Yes. I believe that when we encounter Jesus in each other as we love and forgive each other this gives us hope for a new resurrected future. When I had dinner with Dr. Suhaila the other night – Dr. Suhaila, my friend the chief operating officer at Ahli Episcopal Hospital in Gaza City, had escaped from Gaza via the Rafa gate in December sharing a meal before me in Houston. Not a whine, not a complaint did I hear but rather - She told me her plans to return soon to build a tent hospital for Gazans sheltering at the Rafa gate. They need medicine and care, she said.

And I thought... Jesus was there in her voice, her courage and her hope that war would end. We are all God’ children she told me that night and must be a witness to his love.

All of us beloved children of God. Jesus’ appearance stories during Eastertide assures me and I hope all of us that God is still at work in us and in our world. Through us, thru the Carl’s music, thru Suhaila’s courage, through the minister at Jay’s bedside, you hear the appearance story of Jesus- and bearing witness to that truth that **together we can change the world. Jesus is in each one of us. Jesus is here in this room.**

1. Crossroads Podcast Episode One: “Where Sacred and Civic Meet”

