

Sermon
Third Sunday of Easter
Sunday, April 14th, 2024
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Readings: ACTS 3:12-19; PSALM 4; 1 JOHN 3:1-7; LUKE 24:36B-48

I have a Fitbit. When I have been sitting too long, it gives me a little zap and reminds me to get up and move around. I've been wearing it for years, yet each "zap" surprises me. I'm startled, and it makes me pay attention to what I am doing. It makes me question the unfolding of my day. Will I get up and move around? Will I keep sitting?

These Resurrection stories we hear in Eastertide – these tellings of Jesus appearing among the disciples – offer us a "zap". A "zap" for our faith, and our belief. A "zap" in our lives as Christians...

We revisit this ancient Scripture each year. Some of us have heard these Resurrection stories many times. For some of us they are new. I think it's fair to say that for all of us, these stories have many mysterious elements. They are told in a way that leave us wondering about many of the details: Jesus is hung on a cross, and he dies, yet the tomb is empty on the third day. How? Jesus appears among them again. How? Last week, from John's Gospel, we heard that the disciples had barricaded themselves behind a locked door, yet Jesus appears among them. How? And in today's passage, from Luke, the disciples think they are seeing a ghost – did he look ghostly? This story follows the one that recounts the road to Emmaus when Jesus and two of the disciples talk and they don't even recognize him. What did he look like that they didn't recognize him? These stories leave us wondering, and this is the point! They leave us questioning, wondering how it could be possible. This is one of the many gifts of the Resurrection: Wonder. Amazement. Astonishment, which is a blessed blend of belief and disbelief.

Today's Gospel passage brings us one of my favourite verses: "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, Jesus said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'" Joy, and disbelief and wonder are linked with incarnation and with embodiment in Jesus's request for something to eat! Luke uses this to respond to the suggestion that Jesus might be a ghost – no ghost would eat a piece of fish in their presence. As well as this, though, is a blessed reminder of the goodness of

our physical, embodied selves. The Christmas witness is that God becomes flesh and dwells among us, making clear the fundamental good of all of creation, demonstrating the indwelling of divine presence and power in all things. Christmas and Easter together uphold the blessed news about the goodness of creation. And, the physicality of the resurrection is astonishing, and its impossibility makes it a sign of the dawning of God's realm.

Our reading from Acts is easy to misinterpret if it is read and heard from anything other than an open-minded, open-hearted posture. It makes little sense unless we remind ourselves that this passage follows a dramatic healing story – a healing that took place in Jesus' name. A healing that inspired wonder and astonishment and joy. This passage can be read in an anti-Jewish way, but it is crucial to remember that while Peter addresses "Jews" directly, he does so as a Jew himself, arguing that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah described in ancient Jewish thought and scripture. He calls his listeners to repent, but we know that Peter has himself betrayed Jesus. Peter is the preacher of this "sermon", and the call to repentance is for him, too. The passage we hear this morning ends at verse 19, but Peter goes on in verse 21 to speak strikingly of a "universal restoration" - not the saving of a few, but the saving of all, regardless of their identity or past behavior. There is in this "universal restoration" an open-minded, open-hearted message of life made new in and through Jesus. We must not forget this.

These Resurrection stories are not meant to settle us into our faith. They are not meant to convince us to believe. These stories are an invitation into a living faith. These ancient stories are meant to astound us. They are meant to astonish us and leave us taken aback. The "zap" that we get from them is that they call into question our assumptions about what is possible, and impossible. Just as the "zap" of my Fitbit invites me to change my physical posture, the "zap" of these Resurrection stories invites us to change the posture of our faith.

Resurrection comes in many ways in these stories, and the mystery in and around them remind us to take up a posture and perspective of joy, astonishment and wonder. They invite us to join the disciples, and to allow ourselves the emotion and energy of joy and disbelief and wonder. These stories invite us into an open-minded, open-hearted "faith posture" of astonishment, wonder, and Easter joy. They invite us to move into a place where our hearts and minds embrace the belief that nothing is impossible with God. This is a posture that keeps our hearts and minds humble and open to what the Spirit does next.

Richard Rohr reminds us that:

“[Jesus] said ‘follow’ me. But instead of following Jesus, we spent most of our energy worshipping Jesus, and then arguing about the form of worship, when he never said ‘worship me’ to begin with. He said ‘follow me’. That is an entirely different agenda.

Richard Rohr also says:

“Worship of Jesus is rather harmless and risk free...actually following Jesus changes everything”.

Actually following Jesus *does* change everything. I’m not saying that we shouldn’t worship. Worship – mornings like this when we sing and pray and share in the Sacrament together – we need it because it reminds us to pause and to think about the posture of our faith.. Worship reminds us that life is full of mystery, but that the Risen Christ has infused all of that mystery with hope, and potential and possibility.

I’ve received various word of the day emails over the years. I don’t always remember them, but one that has stayed with me is from the Society of St. John the Evangelist. They offer a word and a short reflection and one I remember is: “presence”. I share it with you. It asks: Where is the resurrected Jesus to be found today? In your presence, through your words, with your touch, in your heart. It is no longer you, just plain you who lives under your skin; it is Christ who lives within you.” Christ lives within us in our wonder. In our amazement. In our astonishment at the Resurrection.

Today, we are invited to embrace the joy and wonder, the disbelief, and the astonishment that are all part of the Resurrection. I pray that today’s scripture, and our sharing of song and prayer and sacrament may be like the “zap” of a Fitbit, reminding us to move into an open-minded, open-hearted “faith posture” of astonishment, wonder, and Easter joy. May we, in that posture, know that Christ lives within us. May we open our hearts and minds to God’s possibilities even in the midst of what might feel impossible. May we make the resurrected Jesus known in our words and actions, today, and always. In Jesus name. Amen.