

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Daris Bultena

April 26, 2009

3rd Sunday of Easter

Acts 3:12-19

¹²When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,"

Luke 24:36b-48

^{36b}Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things."

"To Stand Among"

In Luke's Gospel this episode is the place where the Risen Christ appears among the disciples in Jerusalem.

Early in the Second Century, Ignatius, that bishop and martyr too, warned Christians to pay attention to the reality of the bodily resurrection. He was clear that to ascend to a mere spiritual view of resurrection was not only incomplete but incompatible with the reality of how God's

fullness is demonstrated in the incarnation of the person of Jesus the Christ.

To the early Church and to us still today who stand in the midst of this great tradition, the event of the resurrection and indeed of the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth stand as the center-piece of who we are as a people and become the very lens through which we define ourselves and identify ourselves.

We are people of the resurrection. That proclamation is made so clear in the Sacrament of Baptism. It is there that we claim the action of God on our lives as a full movement of grace. In the waters of baptism we see with our eyes and experience in the element of water the powerful reality that God reaches all the way out and all the way down to claim us fully as the children of God.

Even before we can lay claim to that reality, God in sure sign and symbol proclaims it over our very lives. We are the children of God. We have been washed in resurrection. We die to sin—it still exists and is a clear and present danger in our lives—but its power is stripped away and the power of life is upon us. We become dead to sin and alive to all that is good in Christ Jesus. We are the resurrection people.

It is this power of resurrection that prepares us and sets us up to be ready, reliable, credible witnesses to what God has done in the world. It forms us as disciples and apostles. When we look into the baptismal font we are seeing the empty tomb—and it is that empty tombness—it is that being alive fully that we are witnesses too. We witness a kind of life that nothing—including the power of death—oh, nothing can stop this life that is in and of us.

And we are the witnesses. That is what Jesus tells them in this passage—“You are my witnesses.” Such is a role—a functional role that I want us to grasp as God’s people. We have been baptized into this functional role—witness!

To witness, however, is not merely to tell. There is more than telling that is going on here. I want us to claim what I have been referring to in recent weeks as the “cosmic.” I want us to lay hold of the cosmic reality that is also here and that we have as the ones who not only believe but follow in the way of this God who has power to bring life out of death.

The cosmic reality is that we are so bound to and held in the connection with God that we are, to use the words of the Apostle Paul, “the Body of Christ.” I’m going to take that a bit farther and tell you that it is not only in a spiritual sense, but in a physical one. There is something to this whole incarnation and these bodies of ours.

The physical reality of the Risen Christ is also a physical reality to us and as such we in our bodies bear the mark and fullness of the living God. You are the Body of Christ. Hear that! You are the body of Christ!!

Notice what it says in that first verse of the passage today. What it says there in verse 36b is: “Jesus himself stood among them...”

While this passage is so rich—I want to concentrate on those words: “Jesus himself stood among them.”

As the Body of Christ—that is our functional role. “To stand among.” “To stand among,” is what we are called to do. Yes, we are to believe, but believing is not only an intellectual assent, it is also an active shaping of what we do with our lives and how we handle our own particular incarnation.

*

So the big question these few words prompt for us is: “Who are you standing among?” “Who are you standing among?” That is a practical question, and it is also a faith question—it is at the heart of our theological call as the baptized sons and daughters of God—“Who are you standing among?”

Know that is your purpose—“to stand among.” That is what you are here for. In our culture we get so programmed to think of ourselves independently. No, dependence is the nature of authentic community. We were created not to stand outside of others, but “to stand among” them.

As a church we have identified our purpose as “Changing lives and growing in God’s love.” It is a beautiful and succinct purpose statement. It can also be a wonderful purpose statement for each of our own lives too--- feel free to claim it as such. “My purpose is to change lives and grow in God’s love.”

In order to bring that about, not only to change lives, but also to grow in God’s love—you cannot stand alone or outside, but the posture must be to stand among.

So, who are you standing among? Who?

Know your purpose and boldly challenge yourself with the question. “My purpose is to change lives and grow in God’s love. How am I incarnating that purpose by standing among others? Who am I standing among?”

*

Of utmost importance is that you know who you are as you stand among others—as you stand among or alongside of someone else you have to know who you are. Who are you?

You are the Body of Christ! As such, when you stand among or alongside someone else you are the very reality of Risen Christ. It is not just you there—you, oh baptized one, are the very presence of Christ. He is in you, of you, and through you---You are the presence of Christ. That is a cosmic reality. It is truer than any truth of the present age.

Who are you standing alongside? Are you clear that you are the very physical presence of Christ in this age? Yes this is a holy work, and you are the baptized, resurrected, holy ones!

As you stand among or alongside—you also have to know your motivation. We get so messed up on the motivations in this world. And we get messed up because we lose sight of the cosmic reality that we are the Body of Christ and we are the physical manifestation of Jesus in this age.

We get messed up on our motivations and we start to think that it is about us and not about God. It has always been about God. It has never been about us. But we relish in making this all about us. So we do that in our serving too. We make it about us.

And as we make it about us our motivations get messed up. We start to think that standing alongside another is something we do to feel good. We do it in order to get that high of knowing that it is us in our own power that we have made a difference. We have made the world a better place. We have brightened someone's day—and it strokes our ego.

Oh our motivations can be so messed. There is also the dark side of motivation—we end up standing alongside or standing among those who have need not out of our relationship with God, but out of guilt. What is it with guilt? How is it that we can be so motivated by guilt? If you feel guilty, check that. It is a warning light on the dashboard of your life that some motivation somewhere is not firing in the way that it should. Check it. Something is out of balance.

Guilt is never Christian territory; it just is not part of the terrain.

It all comes back to motivation. What is your motivation for what you do? Is it guilt? Is it that you want to be noticed? Is it that you want to feel good about yourself? Is it? Just what is it?

The motivation becomes clear—it is as old as creation and as new as each time we open the Bible and come to the Lord’s Table. The motivation is love. “We love because he first loved us.” “We love because he first loved us.”

This is all about love. It has always been about love—not love as blushy romantic feeling, but love as clear choice and choosing another. God does that in Christ Jesus for all of humanity. God chooses us. In resurrection we see God’s choice fully demonstrated. It is love.

But love too has healthy boundaries. Love demands that we stand alongside without being compulsive, or obsessive, or even insistent. Love always has healthy boundaries and is aware that its easy for our motivations to fall back to the old way and result in enmeshment where our helping is not helpful but more out of desperation.

Jesus was never desperate with his disciples. And he is not with us. And he does not want us to be that way with others either. What he calls us to do now is to come alongside another – and even to come alongside each other and stand there—connected, willing, serving, loving, being.

Connected, willing, serving, loving, being those ready, reliable, credible witnesses that we are because we know. We know. We know that Jesus is raised, and so are we!

Know it. Stand in it. And stand alongside and among them with that truth. Amen.