**Weekend of Sunday, April 14, 2024**

**Third Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Year B**

**First Reading: Acts 3:12-19**

**Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-7**

**Processional Gospel Reading: Luke 24:36b-48**

**Sermon Title: *“Encountering Resurrection: Embracing the Power of Redemption”***

**Theme**

*The gospel for the third Sunday of Easter is always one in which the risen Christ shares food with the disciples, meals that are the Easter template for the meal we share each Sunday. In today’s gospel, Jesus both shares the disciples’ food and shows them the meaning of his suffering, death, and resurrection through the scriptures, the two main elements of our Sunday worship.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Acts 3:12-19**

12[Peter] 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.”

**Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-7**

1See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.  
 4Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. 7Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

**Gospel: Luke 24:36b-48**

36bJesus himself stood among [the disciples] 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.”

**Sermon**

Today we continue our celebration of the sacred season of Easter. As we do that, we will delve into the depths of resurrection truth. I pray that you will allow these truths to penetrate the darkest corners of our souls with the radiant light of that truth. Easter is not merely a commemoration of a historical event; it is an invitation to encounter the living Christ; and to experience the transformative power of redemption in our lives.

*Before we get into the scriptures, I have some more Easter interruptions: What do you call a bunny with flees? Bugs Bunny*

By way of context, the reading from the Gospel according to Luke takes place on the evening of Resurrection Sunday. According to Luke, on that first Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James went to the tomb to prepare Jesus’s body for burial. Remember that because the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday evening, that would be Good Friday evening, and then Saturday was the Sabbath, Sunday morning was the earliest that they could do the work they planned to do.

When they arrived at the tomb, the stone closure had been rolled away. Bravely, they went inside the open tomb and saw that the body was gone. At that same time, the women were confronted with two men “in dazzling clothes” who asked,

Luke 24:5-7"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. 6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

But then Luke writes,

11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Later that same Easter Sunday there was the Emmaus Road appearance. The Risen Lord Jesus appeared to two second-tier disciples, Cleopas and another who didn’t get credit, and they hastened back to Jerusalem to where the disciples were hiding out and reported what they witnessed.

Given what they had witnessed on Friday, the disciples found themselves grappling with disbelief and confusion over the reports. Yet, amid their turmoil, Jesus appeared among them, bringing a message of hope and reconciliation. Standing in their midst, He spoke words of reassurance: "Peace be with you" (Luke 24:36b).

The resurrection of Jesus shatters the chains of death and ushers in a new era of divine grace. Through His victory over the grave, He opens the door to eternal life for all believers. His resurrection is not merely a historical fact but a present reality, an ever-present source of strength and renewal for those who put their trust in Him.

In this encounter with the risen Christ recorded in the Gospel according to Luke, we find solace for our weary souls and courage to face the challenges that lie ahead. Just as Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples, He longs to reveal Himself to us – today! My question is, do you seek him?

(Sallman’s “Christ at Heart’s Door”)

Jesus stands at the door of our hearts, knocking, inviting us to welcome Him in and experience the fullness of His presence.

*Time for another Easter interruption: Why shouldn’t you tell an Easter egg a joke? It might crack up*

The apostle John reminds us of the profound love of God, which He lavishes upon us, calling us His children.

1See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

This truth is central to our identity as followers of Christ. We are not merely servants or subjects; we are beloved children of the Most High.

As children of God, we are heirs to His kingdom, co-heirs with Christ Himself. This inheritance is not based on our merit or worthiness but on the boundless grace of God, won through Christ on the cross. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been adopted into God's family, and welcomed with open arms into the embrace of His love.

In this assurance as beloved children, we find the strength to overcome sin and temptation. We are no longer slaves to our past or prisoners of our mistakes. I often use the axiom: “We are defined by our futures, and not our pasts.” Instead, we are set free by the power of Christ's resurrection, empowered to live lives of holiness and righteousness. And when we falter, and we will falter, there is grace for that.

*And one final Easter interruption for today. What do you call a line of rabbits jumping backward?* A receding hare-line

Turning to Acts, we have a portion of Peter’s Holy Spirit-inspired sermon that he preached on the Day of Pentecost. In the wake of Peter's powerful sermon, we witness the response of the crowd as they were convicted of their sin and invited to repentance. Peter did not mince words but spoke boldly of their complicity in the crucifixion of Jesus: He said, “You handed over and rejected Holy and Righteous One in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.”

Yet, even in the face of their guilt and shame, Peter extends to them the offer of forgiveness and reconciliation. He calls them to repentance, urging them to turn away from their sin and embrace the salvation that is offered to them through Jesus Christ.

19Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, 20so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

This call to repentance and renewal echoes down through the ages, reaching us here today. It is a reminder that Easter is not merely a time of celebration but also a season of introspection and self-examination. Having been given so much grace, we should take the opportunity to confront our own sinfulness, to lay bare our hearts before God, and to seek His forgiveness and grace; and he will deliver it.

However, even though God in Christ has forgiven each of us of all our sin, there are probably still some among us that can’t accept the grace of God. Are you still packing around junk that you think no one could ever forgive? Given what we have been discussing, don’t you think that is a rather arrogant thought? Breaking news! You are not that special! There is nothing you can do that God in Christ cannot forgive. Come eat the bread of remembrance and the drink the wine of forgiveness. God in Christ has forgiven you.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

As we reflect on the scriptures that have been set before us, let us not be content with mere intellectual assent or passive observance. Let us instead open our hearts to the transforming power of the resurrection, allowing it to penetrate to the very core of our beings.

May we encounter the risen Christ in our midst, experiencing the peace that surpasses all understanding and the joy that knows no bounds.

May we embrace our identity as beloved children of God, living lives that reflect the grace and love that has been poured out upon us.

And may we respond to the call to repentance and renewal, turning away from our sin and embracing the new life that is offered to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As we journey forward from this place, may we carry with us the hope and promise of Easter, shining as beacons of light in a world that is often shrouded in darkness.

May the God of resurrection fill us with His Spirit, empowering us to live lives that bear witness to the transformative power of His love.

**Prayer**

Holy and righteous God, you are the author of life, and you adopt us to be your children. Today we find ourselves relating to the disciples who find the story of their Lord Jesus’s resurrection preposterous; too good to be true. Remind us of your grace every day, and inspire us with your Spirit to live lives worthy of our salvation. We pray this in Jesus’s name. Amen