

Easter 3

Today's gospel recounts the events of that first Sunday evening after the crucifixion, when Jesus was suddenly there in person among his terrified disciples. Cleopas and his companion are telling the other disciples how Jesus appeared to them on the road to Emmaus when Jesus, again, appears up out of nowhere, interrupting their conversation.

Once again, they see him, they hear his voice, but they don't recognize him at first. As it says in our gospel reading, they "thought that they were seeing a ghost."

They knew Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. They knew dead men don't come back to life. This, surely, could only be a ghost, a spirit without a body. One could say that the tomb was open, but their minds were closed.

The disciples were unable to recognize the holiness that stood among them. They were continuing to live, think, and understand in the usual human categories. They had separated spirit and matter, divinity and humanity, heaven and earth.

Whenever we make that separation we close our minds, we deny ourselves the resurrected life for which Christ died, and we lose our sense of and ability to recognize holiness in the world, in one another, and in ourselves.

We can see in this gospel passage that the resurrected life of Christ is revealed in and through the created order. It is not, however, bound by the created order. Rather, the resurrected body and life of Christ bring together the visible and invisible, matter and spirit, humanity and divinity.

On the one hand Jesus has a real body. On the other hand it is not subject to the natural laws of time and space. It's not one or the other. It's both. It is a new and different reality.

With Jesus' resurrection, God shatters human categories of who God is, where God's life and energy are to be found, and how God works in this world. Resurrected life can never be comprehended, contained, or controlled by human thought or understanding. Jesus' resurrection compels us to step outside our usual human understandings of reality and enter into the divine reality.

That new reality begins with touching and seeing, flesh and bones, hands and feet, and broiled fish. Jesus said to his disciples, "Look 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." Then "he showed them his hands and his feet." After this he ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

Flesh and bones, hands and feet, and broiled fish are the things of creation, the natural order. Mary, a woman created by God, gave Jesus his flesh and bones and his hands and feet. She also gave him the stomach that would eat the fish God created. The very same flesh and bones, the very same hands and feet, appeared to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus and then "vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31), and now turns up unannounced and unexpected in the midst of their conversation with others.

I'd say that the degree to which we have allowed ourselves to be bound by the created order is the degree to which we are unable to see resurrected life and holiness in this world. We bind ourselves through our fears, our sorrows and losses, our runaway thoughts and distractions, our attachments and addictions to things, people, and even beliefs. Sometimes it's our unwillingness to allow or trust God to grow and change us. In binding ourselves to the created order we lose recognition of and the ability to live in the sacred. That's the very opposite of resurrected life.

The resurrected life of Christ reveals that all creation and every one of us are filled with God, holiness, divinity. Nothing can bind or supersede the grace that is given us through resurrection: unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness, unconditional life. That is, I think, one of the most difficult things for us to see, believe, and live into. It is, however, the divine reality into which we are invited, not at some future time and place but here and now.

Christ our God longs and desires to open our minds to understand the scriptures, to understand all that has been written, spoken, and revealed about him in whatever form that happens and has happened. That the disciples are witnesses does not mean they now have all the answers. It means they now have the life Jesus wants to give them. They are witnesses based not on what they know, but on who they are, how they live, and their relationship with the risen Christ.

This means that at some point we have to move from the event of the resurrection to experiencing the resurrection. Experiencing resurrected life begins with recognizing the risen Christ among us, here and now, in Godshill and Ventnor in April 2021. That is the gift of Easter, and it is also the difficulty and challenge described in today's gospel.

Think about a time in your life when you lost track of time. I don't mean you forgot what time it was, but that you were so awake, so present, that you entered a new world, maybe looking at a sunset or watching the waves. Those are the moments when Christ opens our minds to understand.

In each of those moments the one who is fully alive and risen, the Christ, is calling us to see and recognize him, to join him, and to discover our new life in him. This is the authentic self we long to become, the self that we already are, and the self we are becoming, both as individuals and as church communities. This is resurrected life.

Let's not lose this moment. Let's not put this text behind us. It is much too easy to come here each Sunday, listen to the gospel, hear, for better or worse, whatever whoever is preaching has to say, and then return to life as usual. Don't let that happen. Your life is too important to let that happen. Carry this text with you over the next week. Let it open your eyes, your heart, and your mind to the life Christ is offering you. Let it be the voice of Christ opening your mind to understand. Sit with it. Pray with it. Wrestle with it. Trust it.

Jesus says to us, "You are witnesses of these things," Tell it. Live it. Become it. It's not enough then merely to proclaim, "Christ is risen!" It's not enough simply to believe in the resurrection. We are witnesses!

The resurrected life is yours. You are witnesses.