

Easter 3b 2024  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
April 14, 2024  
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

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

Who won the NCAA (women's) basketball tournament? Who's winning after Round 3 of the (golf) Masters Tournament? What television show is Meghan Markle known for? Who is the "letter turner" on a long-time game show? Who is Jesus? Have you seen him lately? I thought so. And, me, too.

Jesus tells the disciples: "You are witnesses of these things." Peter tells the crowd on the portico at Solomon's Temple: "To this we are witnesses." We "witness," we see, many things; we are not witnesses to sports and television and trivia in the same way that we are witnesses to the Good News. The Good News is Jesus the Christ, God raised from the dead. We are witnesses to resurrected life; Jesus and Peter say that we are the ones to proclaim the Messiah, beginning from home.

Being a witness to Jesus is not a hobby, not background noise to our lives. Being witnesses to Christ is who we are. Being a witness to God is our state of being. We are not in the waiting season of Advent, waiting for Jesus to be born. We are not in the waiting and preparation season of Lent. We are in the Alleluia Christ is risen! season for the fifty days of Eastertide. Who will know about this season unless we live it and tell it?

For many of us, witnessing (as a verb) might not sound like good news. We'll wait until the next miracle happens, a bigger one or something closer to home. Maybe we're mad at Jesus for something. We didn't win the lottery. Not that we bought a ticket, mind you, but ... we want the miracle. And another one. The thing is, we are not consumers of God. We are witness to God. We are not consumers of the church. We are the church. We are, as the epistle of 1 John reminds us, children of God. Beloved. We are all of these things now. We are right in the middle, on the field, winners of the game show, star players, of the very best news ever. We are not on the sidelines to resurrection, to church, to good news. What are we waiting for? Who is it that we waiting for?

Theologians Matt Skinner and Karoline Lewis remind us that if we are silent witnesses, our silence speaks loudly. Our presence or our absence communicates how we accept who we are, and "how others see God to be....We are never NOT giving witness to God.... 'We are witnesses' does not depend on our acceptance or agreement or approval. 'We are witnesses' does not depend on our readiness or recognition or responsiveness. 'We are witnesses' just is."

God is active. God keeps showing up to expand our imaginations, to be present in Jesus and the Holy Spirit and in (the faces of) everyone. Everyone. Everywhere and anywhere. Have you seen the azaleas in the garth? And the daffodils before them? This is creation boasting its beauty right in front of our eyes! How about the butterfly garden? That area, through imaginative minds and skillful hands is bringing new life to a sort of bedraggled area. Do you know what's new, or the struggles and joys of someone three pews behind you? In front of you? All of nature lends itself to this season of alleluia. And being a witness just is. Alleluia!

Because witnessing is not optional – we’re doing it all the time, what if we get used to intentional witness this Easter season. Then we’ll be familiar with carrying our visible witness of our words, actions – our lives, into the season after Pentecost, and the next, and the next. Nervous? Remember Jesus showing up to a grieving Mary. To some worried apostles who don’t know what’s ahead for them and their witness, their lives. Jesus shows up and says: ‘Peace be with you.’”

This is not the offering of just any kind of peace, but the *shalom* that only Jesus can give. Shalom is the peace about which we say “passes all understanding.” It is the peace that we share when Jesus is among us. THIS is the “peace” that we offer and share with one another in worship. Jesus is with us.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus says. “Why are you frightened?”

We also witness through the pattern of our Eucharistic worship, our gathering of thanks-giving. Let’s take a look at what we do on most Sundays.

The Eucharist has two distinct parts:

The Liturgy of the Word.

*He opened their minds to the meaning of the Scriptures.*

The Liturgy of the Table.

*He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

These two parts of our worship are bridged by a sermon. A sermon is one person’s (usually an ordained person’s) response or exposition of the good news. We are meant to be opening our minds to the Scriptures, pointing our hearts to Christ, through the sermon or homily.

We then prepare further to come to our Lord, to receive Christ’s body into our own. We offer our prayers in the prayers of the people. Please, Lord, hear us! Heal us! We present ourselves to God in a corporate confession, asking to be forgiven for things done and left undone. We now have heard God’s inspired word, prayed, responded, and prepared.

Now, we, too, say “peace.”

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

We offer to one another the peace that only our Savior can give. We join the opening our minds and the receiving of Christ’s body with Christ’s peace. *Shalom*.

We break bread together, coming to God’s table, taking bread and wine. We pray, give thanks, send ourselves into the world. We have prepared ourselves for the world: hearts opened, forgiven, taking in Christ. We have met Christ here in word and in table.

In this time in which our “alleluias” are fresh and strong, when Jesus is with us in a new way, what now shall we tell the world? What will we share “in our lips and in our lives” – about the Gospel, about being beloved children of God? We, not just Mary of Magdala and the apostles, have much to tell. The apostles were sent out from Jerusalem to tell the whole world. We are sent out from 120 Mauldin Rd in Greenville, SC. And from each of our homes.

Practice now your witness. Live fully into “alleluia.” Recognize that Jesus keeps showing up – everywhere. Help us, Lord, to witness. Alleluia!