

Episcopal Church of the Resurrection
Centerville, Utah

April 26, 2009
The Rev. Steven C. Andersen

YEAR B, EASTER 03
Acts 3:12-19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48

BELIEVING IS SEEING

I don't think much about it, but this is the Church of the Resurrection, isn't it? Somebody, or somebodies, back when this parish was being established, out of all the possible names, came up with the Church of the Resurrection. I don't know how random that is, or how prophetic it is either. But the notion of the Resurrection would seem to be significant in this parish. This is our time, and our season of the resurrection. And the blessing of the church calendar give us these fifty wonderful days in the season of Easter, to explore, to wonder, to marvel and to rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today's gospel from Luke is one of the several stories, of Jesus coming to the disciples after his resurrection. Luke tells of two post-resurrection visits to the disciples by Jesus. The first is the Emmaus road trip. Jesus walked along with two of the disciples, curiously unrecognized by them. They were telling Jesus of the astounding events of the past week, including the empty tomb. And Jesus explained to them, the whole of the scriptures to as they walked along. When they came to a village, the disciples invited the still unrecognized Jesus to join them for an evening meal. When Jesus broke and blessed the bread, they suddenly recognized him. And then just as suddenly,

Jesus vanished from their midst. These two then got up and left from where they were, to return to Jerusalem to tell the others about their experience. And no sooner do they begin to tell them the incredible story, that the physically resurrected Jesus had visited them, then Jesus visits them all in today's reading from Luke.

It seems to me that these post-resurrection appearances by Jesus were important. If there was just the empty tomb, I wonder if the disciples, or anyone else for that matter, would have believed that Jesus really lived again after once being dead. For the disciples, seeing was believing. They knew him during his lifetime – better than anyone. They had heard, and understood, better than anyone, what Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God. But at this moment, with Jesus, physically standing in the room with them, they didn't know what to think. As it says in the gospel, they were startled, and they were terrified. In the vernacular, they were freaking out. He first offered them a greeting of peace He then invites them to check him out – to know that it was really He that was here with them. For the disciples, seeing was believing. They saw, and they believed. And it is from their belief, and their witness, that millions of others, for more than twenty centuries, and from all over the world, also came to believe.

But believe in what exactly? That Jesus lived again after being dead? That is a major big deal – it is fascinating, it is incredible and it is mind-boggling.

But that is not nearly enough. Jesus' resurrection confirmed that he was the Messiah. The one sent from God to restore all people to Himself. If there were doubts about the existence of God, they were gone in an instant, and forever. If there were doubts about anything that Jesus taught, from God's steadfast love for his people, to the Kingdom of Heaven, they doubted no more. If they had wondered about the meaning, the value and the purpose of their own lives, they wondered no more. They believed and they understood. The atonement of Jesus on the cross, and his resurrection, had opened for them as well, the door to their own resurrection life. (repeat) What before had been black and white, two dimensional and tragically temporary, could now be a kaleidoscope of colors, with untold dimensions, and forever and forever, without end. Seeing was believing. And believing led them to live resurrection lives as well; complete lives, fully actualized as children of God.

I want to believe like that. Don't you? I want to know that there is a God. I mean know, absolutely, positively and without any doubts. You too? I want to know – know – that Jesus is the Messiah. That he is God's son, sent to us. I know that my sins, those things that I have done, and those things which I chose not to do, have separated me from God. I want to know that because of Jesus and through Jesus, I can be restored to full stature as a child of God. I want to know that God lives. I want to believe in God's promise found in Paul's letter to the Romans: that there is absolutely nothing that can separate me from

the love of God. Nothing. I need to know that I have some value, that there is some purpose for my life. I need to know that I belong, and that I matter. I need to know, that I am loved. I want to believe. I need to believe. I too want to see Jesus.

But we are not the disciples, living in those scant few days after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is not going to appear to us in that way. At least I don't think so. Of course, that decision is far above my pay grade. But if seeing is believing, how then do we see Jesus in our lives, and in our time?

It turns out, that seeing is not always believing. Any magician will tell you, that what they do are illusions, not really magic. We may see things that are impossible, like defying the laws of gravity. I am fascinated by these demonstrations. Criss Angel and David Blaine are two outstanding magicians – make that illusionists – that are absolutely astounding. But at the end of the day, even what we see, may not lead us to truth. When it comes to the things that are the most profoundly important to us – like the meaning and purpose for our lives – we honestly have no sure knowledge whatsoever. And in fairness to the disciples, even seeing, they must have had their doubts. Did we really see what we thought we saw? It was truly impossible, wasn't it? As incredible as their experience this day with the resurrected Jesus was, I don't know that even that would be enough to sustain their lives of faith for the rest of their lifetime.

Maybe knowing God is more than a matter of proof.

It seems to me that perhaps the answer comes from the same place as the question. It is not a brain thing. It is a soul thing. If we intellectually ponder the meaning of life, it is a philosophical search. We can have a stimulating journey, and perhaps enjoy some intriguing theories. But that isn't very helpful when facing the trials and tragedies of real life. When our hearts are torn, when our souls are battered, and when we feel utterly alone and forsaken, we ask why? Not from our brain, but from our soul. And more than answers, what we really seek is healing. We will find the answers to our soulful longing, the balm for our wounded hearts, and the meaning of our lives the same very place that the disciples did – in our faith. It turns out that seeing is not believing – it may be the other way around. Perhaps believing is seeing. In Paul's letter to the Hebrews he describes faith this way: Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things unseen. In other words, we live and move through our lives, without having sure and perfect knowledge. We of course know that. If we waited to be absolutely sure about anything, we would spend all of our time simply waiting and end up doing nothing. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things unseen. Jesus asks us to believe in him. Believe that there is a living God, creator of all that there is. Believe that God can and will always be with you. Have faith that nothing you can ever do will separate you from the love of God. Believe what the scriptures say, that God

knows every hair on your head, and loves you always.

Believing is seeing. Perhaps these first few disciples did believe because of what they had seen. But if that was how things worked, there would have only been this handful of first generation Christians. But once they believed, they became witnesses to the reality of Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the good news of God through Jesus Christ to all nations. And all of the others, who did not see, came to believe through their witness. Believing in Jesus was seeing God. And so it has been for generation after generation after generation. Those who believed in Jesus saw Jesus – they found healing for their broken hearts, nourishment for their souls, an end to their longing, and profound fulfillment of life. We now, in our time, have received the same witness from those who believed before us. It is up to us to give it a go, to exercise our faith, and work to believe. As it says in Psalm 34, taste God, and see that he is good. In believing, we can find God, we can see God, we can live our lives with God. Alleluia, alleluia, the Lord is risen indeed. The door to our own resurrection life has been flung wide open, and God beckons us to the resurrection life that can be ours. Thanks be to God! Amen.