

“Easter Happens”
The Third Sunday of Easter – April 15, 2018 – Luke 24:36b-48/B

I have four important points to share with you this morning. Point #1 - It happens. Point #2 - It happens in community. Point #3 - It happens amidst uncertainty. Point #4 - It happens within God's Plan of Life. Death. New life. Easter Happens. And even though you would think some things just embody the potential for change, Jesus' life, as well as his death and Resurrection were not initially the change agents you might expect. For example, Luke's characters in the climax of his Gospel, were a hard sell for this Easter thing.

Peter goes to tomb because the women told him what they saw. Once there, the women's report is confirmed, and Peter runs into Jerusalem and tells every living soul that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! No. No, he doesn't. According to Luke, once Peter has witnessed the empty tomb and the grave clothes left behind, he goes home. A couple on the road back to their home in Emmaus, couldn't get out of town soon enough, and even though they walk and talk with the Risen Christ all day long, they don't even recognize him until at supper, he takes a loaf of bread and breaks it, and disappears. Now they can't get back to Jerusalem fast enough, and once they have re-entered the gathering of disciples, Jesus shows up, and everybody is freaking out...

These reactions to Jesus **after** the empty tomb are not much better than **before** it. Remember the rich young ruler? He walks away *sorrowfully*, not liking Jesus' answer to his question. There were ten lepers healed one day, but nine of them never even said "thank you." Those he cured of blindness or immobility could no longer beg for their livelihood; Pig owners lost their herds so a man could come home to his community, and a little boy lost his lunch so 5,000 could be fed. And the disciples, who had left their families and their homes rarely understood what Jesus was getting at. And yet, for all of them, Easter happened.

The first reaction to major or unexpected change in your life, is usually to try to get back to normal. Which begs the question: are we any different because Easter happened 2,000 years ago, which we marked with our celebration of Easter just two weeks ago? Are we back to business as if Sunday had no affect on Monday, even as we are aware *there is no* going back?

Part of the Good News of Easter is that it happens in Community (Point #2). In fact, in today's Prayer of the Day we asked God to "*fill us with your words of life, that we may live as witnesses to the Resurrection...*" We were asking to be changed by the fact that Easter Happens! Perhaps we know deep down that change often comes with the extra support of family, friends, and the faithful. The post-Easter appearances by Jesus created such community - starting with Mary Magdalene, who was still reeling from the experience of what she didn't expect, to Peter and the beloved disciple, then on to include the others, plus Thomas, and then in our story today to include the two from Emmaus - all of them trying to wrap their brains around Easter.

For them, the world was suddenly full of new truth: God was God, and Jesus was who he said he was. I can imagine them thinking, "*If the Resurrection really is true, well, there goes life as we have known it.*" Making sense of Easter is beyond intellect. Even the four gospel writers didn't know how to interpret the Easter event. They just told what they had heard and let God do the work of understanding. And the words of the story spread from Jerusalem through all Judea to Samaria and to the "ends of the earth" after Pentecost. Even down the generations to us - where preachers and the Holy Spirit keep using their words - to fill your ears with what YOU need to

hear, now. In each of us, at some point, Easter happens. Their storytelling goes on, and the community grows.

But Point #3 is that Easter happens in the midst of uncertainty, yet we try to regain control by figuring out God in our own terms - preferring our rugged individualism to community where it happens. Choosing answers and certainty over the uncertainty in which it happens. Forming our own agenda rather than trusting the unexpected and disarming love of God's Plan. God's plan that mirrors the very seasons of Nature through Life. Death. New Life.

We rely on our ideas about God rather than waiting for God to reveal. Theology has turned into proving. No doubts allowed, no faith required, for we are convinced that we have found the answers. But the amazement of those first eye-witnesses and the "pass along the story" (otherwise known as sharing the Good News) witnesses, is an open-ended wish. We **all** want to see Jesus. We **all** want God to be bigger than our imaginings. We **all** want Jesus to surprise us. So God reminds us. Oh yeah! THIS is how God works, how God **always** works: Easter happens within God's Plan: **Life/Death/NEW Life**. A World full of new realities, a world that's no longer what you know. It all works into the pattern of Easter morning's Resurrection; our running away home on the Road to Emmaus and the Return to Jerusalem.

Imagine what it was like when Jesus appeared saying, "*Peace be with you.*" Of course they would think he was a ghost! They had heard he was dead. The news had flashed through Jerusalem like wildfire. But now he is here. Right here. "*Why are you frightened, and why do you doubt? Touch me and see...*" Then here comes the precious, and oh-so-human experience of Life. Death. New Life. "*While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering,*" (the Biblical version of mixed emotions) Jesus said, Got anything to eat? "*They gave him some fish, and he ate it.*"

So here's a new reality. Jesus was drawing them back into community, to a meal around a table, where so much of life unfolds. That fish became a symbol for a brand-new group who would become known as **Christians**. A secret password for those who gathered for bread & wine. A whole new perspective begun in a baptism of repentance. And now, their new life would be to share what people needed for Easter to happen in them: a fresh start, a clean slate, a life 'do-over.' A door wide open to the freedom that comes in being acceptable for exactly who you ARE.

Easter disrupted expectations, and opened a world full of new possibilities. And that is Good News that those who have lost hope do not expect. That is the Good News that God is not who you may have thought, but who will surprise you and embrace you - without conditions. Our Good News to share with the world is that God can create life out of dust and broken dreams and hopelessness and despair. Easter Happens. It forms Community. It exists amidst Uncertainty. It is God's Plan. And you are the ones God sends to make it happen in simple, daily ways.

Let me tell you about Kaylie. She was a counselor at Camp Tomah Shinga last summer, and is now planning on attending seminary. However, last summer, she had begun to doubt herself, she had begun to doubt her call, when Advent came to camp. A few months ago (long after camp was over for the summer) I received a note from her, and I have her permission to share it with you. Listen for the Holy Spirit blowing through her words:

"But out at camp, in the first week, I experienced community- fellowship. Whether you knew it or not, that week changed my perspective and put me back on track, I stopped running from my calling and started owning my calling. Your church was so loving and welcoming, and your words and encouragement made me realize in my studying of religion, I got too caught up in the technical and forgot to look outside my window. Advent reminded me of the physical aspect of faith and the importance of being in community. It refreshed my mind and spirit...You are a light to the people you encounter, thank you!

I still have my blue stone, in fact, I have had the opportunity to preach...and every time that stone sat in the pulpit with me...it reminds me of hope and confidence. It reminds me of the confidence God has in me to go forth in my ministry and tells me there are people out there who see that same confidence. It reminds me to lean on God and those around me. I know God has called me, and when I speak of God and am able to describe the love and acceptance that God brings, I feel at peace and I know who I am. “

You did that, People of Advent, whether you were with us at camp or just holding us in your prayers. **You** made someone feel peace, and **you** gave her the assurance of who she is as a child of God. See? Easter happens. AMEN.



Christian **symbol** for the Greek word *ichthys* interpreted as an acrostic in which the Greek letters are the initials of the words I ēsous Ch ristos th eou hy ios s otēr **meaning** Jesus Christ Son of God Savior.

Iota for *Iesous* - Jesus
Chi for *Christos* - Christ
Theta for *Theou* – God’s
Upsilon for *Yios* – Son
Sigma for *Soter* - Savior

Resources: Karoline Lewis/*Working Preacher*; lectures on Resurrection/*2017 Festival of Homiletics*, San Antonio; Kaylie Ines/2.21.18 email.