

Kirk of St James
Sermon “Cahoots”
Sunday April 14, 2024
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One of the things I did not realize when you had children is that suddenly everything you do gets rated by toddlers who have incredibly broad and confusing standards. For example, you can make homemade macaroni and cheese one night, and it is “the best meal ever” and the next time you make it “this is yucky, and I don’t want to eat it.” I gave a small of bag of chips to each of the boys for a snack one day and it became “the best day ever” and then forgot to take a blue cup instead of a green cup and it quickly became “the worst day ever.” You cannot win in this system. It is rigged against you. While I struggle on a household level with reviews and ratings, the Angus Reid Institute did a poll of Canadians asking them to look back on 2023 and rate it using specific words.

Looking back on the past year the words went from least (used) to most (used): energizing, boring, cheerful, gloomy, depressing, happy, normal, frustrating, satisfying, anxious, and tied for first place exhausting and grateful. Angus Reid discovered a diverse mix of experience and feelings, especially since it was the first they had done since before the pandemic. They noted two noticeable changes after the pandemic, the first was that there was a nine percent drop in those who were happy with their lives, and a drop of five percent in those who were happy with their stress levels. I thought it was fascinating that exhausting and grateful were the two words that tied for first place, and at the same time totally understand it!

When you come to a passage like the one in Luke today words like gloomy, frustrating and exhausting would have been ones the disciples used to describe their present state. Oddly enough the lectionary covered this passage last week in John as well, but the focus on that passage is more about doubt and faith, whereas in Luke we have fear and then understanding. Luke very carefully lays out six instances of Jesus proving his resurrection including the tomb,

the women telling the eleven what they had found, and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This appearance of Jesus is number five but arguably one of the most important.

At this point we find ourselves watching a noisy and confused group of followers putting together their different stories and experiences trying to figure out what has happened. What parts of this story are fact, and what parts are fiction? We likely know all too well how word can spread in a small community and by the time the story has been passed around the inciting incident can be totally blown out of proportion. Who actually saw the empty tomb? Who witnessed empty grave clothes? Who talked to you on the road to Emmaus? Are you certain it was Jesus? Then suddenly he was standing there among them.

Our familiarity with this story dulls us to the reality of what is happening here. Having someone you thought was dead suddenly appear in the middle of your group would have been just as unbelievable in the ancient world as it would be for us today. Jesus' understated opening words "peace be with you" were comforting and familiar, followed by the modern-day equivalent "why are you freaking out?" Sometimes I wonder if there is not a little humour behind this. Jesus has told them everything they needed to know before he died. The disciples should have been expecting this, but it is clear they were not, and that is okay, it is a lot to take in. So, Jesus moved to reassure them, "see my hands and feet, reach out your hand and touch me, I am really here."

The second proof he offers them--that it is truly him, is he takes food and eats it. "That ghosts were not able to eat or digest food was a truism in the ancient world." While later on over the centuries there were arguments over the bodily resurrection of Christ this moment demonstrates that for all intents and purposes Jesus is corporal, physical, and present. Then Jesus explains using scripture and prophecy what has happened. Sometimes it is only in hindsight that we can get our minds around things that are difficult to understand. It was not that

the disciples had not heard a lot of these things before, it is just now they can see it and truly understand it. They are commissioned as witnesses to the Good News.

Watching Jesus die on the cross, hearing him cry out, seeing his suffering, burying his dead broken body were visceral experiences. It would have been impossible to think that anyone could come back from that. But as Barabra Essex from the Pacific School of Religion writes “The high priest, the scribes, the elders, the skeptics, and the curious had all condemned Jesus as a scoundrel and blasphemer—guilty as charged! The governor, the Roman soldiers, interested bystanders, and criminals had condemned Jesus as a traitor and rebel—guilty as charged! Even God seemed to confirm the verdict, with no rescuing angels, no last-minute acquittal, no surprise witness to change the verdict—guilty as charged!...This should be the end of the story. But we are surprised—God and Jesus are in cahoots against the powers of the world. By Raising Jesus from the dead, God declared to the religious and political leaders that, “This is not about you!” While they thought they had the upper hand and exercised all the power that mattered, God declared that God had been working behind the scenes the whole time.” Now, in this moment the disciples can finally see everything clearly. God had been working to reconcile the world to God’s self.

We too in our modern world understand and experience worry and fear. We worry about our families and friends, we worry about children and grandchildren, we worry about ourselves. We worry about things we may lose, like our jobs or health. We worry about the future and the unknown. God knows that Jesus knows that and in fact not only knows those things but surrounds and holds us, even if we are feeling like the disciples and can’t see it yet. However, this moment when Jesus stands before his disciples and carefully explains everything to them, we come to see the truth—the power of the resurrection is the power to plant the seeds of transformation.

In this account we see Jesus greet the disciples, address their fears, explain to them the significance of what has happened, and now they are witness to this incredible moment in history. Now they can live after death. Now they can let go of fear. Now they can move past locked doors with the confidence that God is in all things and working in the world.

After reading a passage like this I am reminded of how hard that can be. It is good to think about how Luke sets up this passage and see if we can find ourselves in it. Are we feeling like we are trapped behind a locked door with fear? Do we see but doubt? Are things beginning to make sense? Are we witnesses to the Good News? On different days I am in different parts of the process. Maybe you feel that way too. Wherever we are in the process God meets us face to face.

As we try to work out what our faith looks like in the world, we ask ourselves how we can share that Good News, as so many others have before us. How do we share God's love in the world and how does it shape what we do? "The risen Christ makes himself known to us in ways large and small. As people of faith, we are to be witnesses to Christ's presence among us, in our words and deeds; our faith demands nothing less." Together we figure out how to live into this truth.