

Subject: The Triumph of Easter

Subtitle: Taking the victory of the resurrection with us into all of life.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/Mq-dUvCFgcg>

Today we are celebrating the third Sunday of Easter. Centuries ago, as the traditions of the church were being fashioned, this Sunday became known as Jubilantae Sunday. In Latin, the word “jubilantae” is a command that means, “Shout for joy.”¹ This, therefore, was a Sunday for exulting in the triumph of Easter. Yet while we take the time to revisit all that Easter represents, we cannot discount the difficulty of having such faith.

When I think about the command to be joyful, along with the words of last week’s Gospel, “**Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed,**”² I am reminded of how humanly impossible the Christian faith really is. You cannot just tell a person to be joyful if they don’t feel joyful. Neither can you simply tell a person to believe if they don’t. In both scenarios, we need divine help, and this is exactly what we see happening in today’s Gospel.

I think we all want to believe, but when it comes down to where we live, we find ourselves admitting with the centurion who came to Christ with a request to heal his son. When challenged with the question of if he could believe, he said, “***I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!***”³ We, too, need divine assistance with matters of faith.

When the resurrected Christ physically appeared to the disciples, Luke included the insightful comment, “***While they still disbelieved for joy and amazement.***”⁴ Luke, as a physician, wanted to offer a description of the impact this revelation made on their emotional and psychological state. The emotional slump that the cross imposed on them was too much to be overcome in an instant. They needed divine help, which our Lord freely offered. He was patient, he was kind, and he was gentle. Therefore he took them, step by step, into knowing the truth about this completely new reality.

¹ Bing Web Dictionary

² John 20:29

³ Mark 9:24

⁴ Luke 24:41

When Christ personally made himself real to me as a young college student, I, too, needed help. I didn't think I was loveable or worthy of such a gift. Therefore it took time, just like it did for the disciples, for the truth to sink in.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples, our Gospel also relates that ***“They were startled and terrified, and thought that they saw a ghost.”***⁵ They were “startled and terrified” because his appearance was not what any of them expected, and when it happened, it was way more than any of them could fully grasp. So Jesus took the time to reveal what was needed. Luke records that Jesus ***“showed them his hands and his feet.”***⁶ Then he asks them, ***“Have you anything here to eat?”***⁷ Then he took a piece of broiled fish and ***“ate it in their presence.”***⁸

As we look closely at these verses, we can all resonate with the disciple slowness to believe. But we also need to ask what these events mean. Many in our culture are quick to attach some form of symbolic meaning to each detail. But nothing about Luke's description supports symbolic interpretation. The language used is both literal and physical. Jesus clearly states, ***“I am not a phantom. I have flesh and bones. Look at me and see.”***⁹ Then to give irrefutable proof, he not only asks them to touch him, but he also eats a piece of fish in front of them.

In the prologue of Luke's Gospel, he explains that what was written in his Gospel account was carefully investigated and taken from eyewitnesses¹⁰ so that ***“you could know with certainty the truth of these things you have been taught.”***¹¹

Before his resurrection, the disciples thought they knew who Jesus was, but now they discovered that he was unlike any other teacher that had ever been. They already knew that ***“No one ever spoke the way this man does,”***¹² but they had no idea he could conquer the evil devastation of a cursed thing like the cross. Therefore Jesus had to ***“open their***

⁵ Luke 24:37

⁶ Luke 24:40

⁷ Luke 24:41

⁸ Luke 24:43

⁹ Paraphrase of Luke 24:39

¹⁰ Luke 1:1-4

¹¹ Luke 1:4

¹² John 7:46

minds to understand the scriptures,"¹³ which helped them to see everything in a whole new way.

In one of my favorite childhood movies, "The Wizard of Oz," the first part is all in black and white. Then after the tornado sweeps the house up into the air Dorothy and her dog land in Oz. Do you remember that scene? Everything from that point on in the movie is different; everything from then on is in beautiful living color. To her total amazement, Dorothy's first words are, "I don't think we are in Kansas anymore."

A similar experience happened to the disciples after Jesus appears to them. Everything from this point on put Jesus in a whole new light, and their lives afterward were never the same.

From the worldview of the resurrection, everything about this mortal life with its temporal aspirations has changed. World history and its future can now be confidently regarded within Christ's sovereign rule. If Jesus could take the worst that could happen to a human being and turn it into something good, he can certainly do the same for us as we face adverse circumstances.

I admit, this kind of thinking takes some effort. I remember looking at a psychedelic 3D picture that appeared like a jumble of colorful dots. I was told it contained a 3D image, which was not easily apparent. The store clerk, where the picture was being displayed, had to guide me. He told me to not simply look at the picture, but that I had to look through the picture, to see the 3D image. Then, all of sudden, a 3D image of dolphins leaping out of water suddenly appeared. I was astonished, to say the least.

I would imagine St. John wanted believers to look beyond the present appearance of things, when he encouraged believers to view themselves in an entirely new light. In First John, we read these words assigned for our New Testament lesson today, ***"Behold what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will***

¹³ Luke 24:45

be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.¹⁴

Such grand and glorious truths cause all of us to stagger in wonder and amazement. When we feel overwhelmed by its grandeur, our Lord understands our weakness; nor does he despise us as we wrestle to understand its depths. But our struggle to believe also does not let us off the hook. We should pray, as our collect for today directs us, to ask that our Lord would “...*open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work.*”¹⁵ Now we can know with certainty that “*everything written about Jesus in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.*”¹⁶ Now in the light of Christ’s death and resurrection, we can have the confidence that “***repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all peoples and nations.***”¹⁷

Taking this message with us wherever we go has always been a challenge. In the life of our church, we are entering into a time of transition from worshipping apart to worshipping together. Times of transition always included some levels of fear and anxiety, but Christ has promised to be with us even until the end of this age. I love the way that Bill and Gloria Gaither expressed this hope in their hymn, “Because He Lives.”¹⁸ The words go:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives

So let’s go forth with boldness as we meet today’s challenges with the peace and confidence that Christ so freely gives. Amen.

¹⁴ 1 John 3:1-2

¹⁵ BCP, p. 224-225, Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter

¹⁶ Luke 24:27&44

¹⁷ Luke 24:46-47

¹⁸ Gloria and William J. Gaither, 1971

Reflections Questions

- How are you challenged by the human impossibility of the Gospel? How is God helping to believe that it is true?
- The gift of peace is the first blessing offered to the disciples when Christ appeared to them. How have you experienced this peace, and in what ways is God calling you to share that peace with others?
- What implications does being called children of God have for our Christian life? How should this identity affect our present and our future?
- This morning's passage ends with a charge: "You are witnesses of these things." What challenges do you face as you strive to be a witness?