

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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LIVING IN HIS SIGHT

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Text of a Sermon preached on the Thrid Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

ACTS 3:12-19 | PSALM 4

I JOHN 3:1-7 | LUKE 24:36B-48

“While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.”

First Mary Magdalene, then the women who had gone to the tomb with her, then two disciples who had been on the a short trip outside the city. They had seen the Lord and each had a slightly different experience. The men had gone searching for answers. The women had gone searching for him. In the end, as Peter would say, he appeared to those whom he loved, eating and drinking with them.

This final detail, which is more than a detail, is the most startling fact of the resurrection. The light that came into the world when the tomb opened, was not a brief glimpse into another world beyond this world. The news that Jesus died, but returned, was not an hallucination, not a magic trick. Exactly the opposite. Jesus showed them his hands and his side, his suffering and the mark of his death, and then sat down with them to eat.

As he sits down with them to eat, before he explains to them the meaning of the Scriptures, he needs to get their attention. They are saying to themselves: “Don’t believe what you see! It’s too good to be true.” But the anticipation, the joy in their faces betray them. He is like the magician at the party making animals from balloons for the children, but suddenly one pops. Crack! The director of the play focuses our attention on the pivotal moment, the music breaks in, a sudden noise announces a pregnant silence. He asks for a fish.

Jesus eats the fish, and changes the story. We thought this story was going one way, but we were wrong. We thought this story was about regime change, about King Jesus straight up beating King Caesar. Suffering Messiah? We missed that. We thought this story was about our being right and others being wrong. We thought this story was about God being on our side and God punishing the bad guys.

But Jesus eats the fish and then sits down with them. He breaks bread, eats and drinks and speaks to them. He opens their minds to a different way of understanding how God will bring order out of chaos, how God will bring love and fidelity out of sin and lawlessness. He will do it one life at a time, one relationship at a time. He will destroy death and bring life. He will wipe out sin and restore our original purpose.

God has just declared the Great Reversal.

I invite you to concentrate your mind as theirs was at that moment. “He opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

As he ate the fish in front of them, they realized that there was nothing much else to do other than to be a witness. They had all misunderstood, failed, even fallen away. They had all only seen part of what God had planned. They had not seen the plot twist coming, the great reversal.

God was finally giving all people, all nations, all tribes a shot at playing a role in God reclaiming the world from sin and death. Israel would be redeemed as of old, made free again from bondage and slavery. But so now would the whole world.

If you have forgiven or been forgiven, you are part of this great reversal. If you have loved someone to the very end, and no longer fear death, you have seen the Lord, even though you might disbelieve in spite of your joy. If you have stood alongside those persecuted, those discriminated against, those abused and violated by the powers of this world, then you too are a witness to the power of Jesus that shows up when we say his name.

As Jesus eats the fish in front of us our we too are witnesses of the great Reversal in the resurrection of God's beloved Son. Our guilt and shame drop away. Our willingness to cooperate with evil and ignore corruption dies. Our doubt, denial and faithlessness are reversed by the joy of knowing that God is looking for us, that God will find us, and that nothing can overcome God's love for us.

This understanding will take years, millennia to understand. The apostles will announce it, but the church will fail completely to embody the message. The reversal of sin and death is still unfolding. The martyrs all point to it. The countless innocent souls lost in the world's holocausts, as we struggle to remember them, all point to it. Those persecuted, abused, and victimized, seeking to be honored as human beings created in God's image, are all witnesses to the power of Jesus' name to raise us all up and rewrite our story.

We thought this story was about what happens to us when we die. No, this story is what happens when we finally believe, rejoice, and live to God.

“Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.... While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.”

As John says: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will 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.”

This story is not about what happens to us when we die. This story is about what happens to us when we turn and live in his presence, and walk in his sight.