

Easter 3 Year A 2020
April 26, 2020
Sermon

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

I don't know about you, but I tend to be easily distracted, and especially these days, as we are staying home to keep one another safe and healthy, I find that there are all kinds of opportunities for distraction. There's the usual distractions, like having family and pets around when we're trying to get work done, or getting distracted by TV, internet, or other media. But there are other, bigger distractions that have the tendency to wreak havoc on our emotional and spiritual wellbeing. These distractions get in the way of our ability to experience God's presence with us, and see even those things that are right in front of us.

We can be distracted by things like grief and despair, or by dashed hopes. Maybe we had big plans in place that have been canceled or put on hold because of the coronavirus. Maybe we have certain expectations or assumptions that distract us from reality. Perhaps we're feeling depressed or overwhelmed or anxious. Studies have also shown that time spent in isolation and quarantine can even leave you with a "foggy brain", including feelings of absentmindedness, forgetfulness, and lack of focus. Or maybe, like Jesus says of the disciples, we're foolish and slow of heart. Another translation has Jesus saying that the disciples are thick-headed and slow-hearted. Perhaps we can relate to that sometimes.

Distraction could have been the problem for the disciples walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. For some reason, they couldn't recognize Jesus, even though he was right in front of their faces. It's easy to imagine a situation in which they're so overcome by grief and despair that they're not thinking or seeing clearly. They are headed to Emmaus with heavy hearts and muddled vision. And so they walk along the road, and the disciples tell this stranger about Jesus, and all their hopes and expectations and fears. They tell this stranger about the angels and the empty tomb. And Jesus spends the rest of the walk interpreting the scriptures for them.

It is not until Jesus blesses and breaks bread with these disciples that they realize who is with them. In this moment, God clears their eyes, and casts off their distractions so that they are finally able to recognize Jesus in front of them.

Yet, even in their distraction, Jesus walked with the disciples. Jesus walked with the disciples in their grief and despair, in their dashed hopes and in their shattered dreams. Jesus journeyed with them, comforted them with the Word of God, blessed them, and broke bread with them. And the same is true for us. Even when we're too distracted to realize it, Jesus is present with us, too.

In these days where it seems like everyone, even Jesus, is far away, Jesus walks with us. In these days when we're unable to gather with family, friends and loved ones, Jesus walks with us. In these days when even our joy and celebration is made distant, Jesus walks with us. In these days when we might be overcome with fear and uncertainty, Jesus walks with us. And in these days, when faced with grief, death, and loss, Jesus walks with us. We are never alone, because Jesus is always with us.

One of the ways that Jesus remains with us is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has gifted each one of us with the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, to guide us, and to empower us to take action for the sake of others. The Holy Spirit gathers us as a community, and keeps us together, even when we must be physically distant from one another.

Over these last several weeks, members of our congregation have taken the initiative to call one another to check in and pray for one another. Some of them have been given lists of people to call to make sure that everyone hears from the church. But many others have taken the initiative to reach out on their own. In some ways, I wonder if we're more in touch with one another now than we've ever been before! God has empowered these volunteers to use their voice and their faith to reach out to the rest of our community. God has given them the courage to pray---out loud! And for other people to hear! I know as humble Lutherans we don't always like to do those kinds of things, (pause) but the Holy Spirit has empowered these individuals to acts of discipleship and proclamation.

This, my friends, is what it means to be the body of Christ. In fact, after a member of our community received one of these thoughtful phone calls, that was exactly the response: "This is what it means to be the body of Christ."

Being the body of Christ means staying connected with one another even when it's hard to do so. Being the body of Christ means praying for one another, for those in need, and for all of creation. Being the body of Christ means daring to try new things, it means being courageous and vulnerable in order to respond to the challenges of our world. Being the body of Christ means never leaving one another alone, just like Jesus never leaves us alone.

Even in a time where we cannot be physically present with one another, we do not have to be alone. God in Christ promises that there will always be a community for us that will love us and care for us; a community that will support us and pray for us. A community that will walk with us and encourage us. We are never alone. Just as Jesus promises to be with us always, and as God provides a community to journey with us, the Holy Spirit empowers us to reach out to our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world.

So be of good courage, do not lose heart. Christ will never leave you alone, and you are called to never leave others alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.