

Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle B

Acts of the Apostles 3:13-15, 17-19; 1John 2:1-5a; and Luke 24:35-48

For most of my life, I lived in mountainous northeastern Pennsylvania, where winter lasts well into April. Snow frequently blew during Holy Thursday processions. I laughed at the Easter ads because the models wore sleeveless dresses and shorts. The new life of spring would have to wait until May.

Easter can also feel far off. Suffering or loneliness bury us like snow banks; busyness and monotony swirl around us like snow squalls and numb our hearts. Even as more people are vaccinated, COVID cases increase and mass shootings have become daily headlines once again. Our society and our government remain polarized. Genuine peace and an equitable society continue to elude us. We catch glimpses of new life, but the cold and despair of sin will not release their hold on us.

The Third Sunday of Easter opens up the gift of spiritual springtime. God has created for us pathways to enter into the newly alive world of the resurrection. In Luke, when Jesus suddenly stands amidst the disciples on Easter evening, "they [are] startled and terrified and [think] that they [are] seeing a ghost." Before he died, Jesus had repeatedly explained how the prophets predicted his passion; however, the disciples never understood. On Easter night, the acts of seeing, touching and eating and Jesus' explanation of Scripture finally enlighten them. Jesus invites us to see his wounds as well as the wounds of our society wracked by racism, exclusivity and disparity. And we must also see the personal wounds of addiction, broken relationships and poverty of spirit. Jesus further invites the disciples to touch him. Can we savor the caress of those we can touch? Can we realize our words touch the heart of another? Our passage begins with a recap of the Emmaus story, "how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread" and Jesus now eats fish before the disciples. Do we value eating, for the nourishment and the pleasure it provides and for the community it builds? Maybe we ought to turn off work and screens so that we can be renewed by human connections. We are also meant to recognize our need for the Eucharistic meal and the explanation of Scripture. We need the Bible and our church community to convey the complex reality of resurrection that we, limited as we are, cannot grasp alone.

1John offers another pathway into the resurrection, keeping the commandments. Until very recently, this was a keen focus among Catholics, but it has become almost passé. However, God's code intentionally shapes us into better versions of ourselves and deepens our relationship with God. True, there is nothing glamorous about cleaning up a sick person or giving our money to the needy instead of spending it on ourselves, but the steady discipline of the commandments will dazzle us. God's mercy will flow through us. Other will show us mercy, loving us back, forgiving us or standing with us in our suffering. Our wounds will be healed. We will begin to fathom the real meaning of love – and that is resurrection.

Acts 3 highlights a difficult but necessary pathway to the resurrection, the acknowledgement of our sinfulness and the acceptance of God's mercy. Peter, who has just healed a crippled man, faces a crowd, rapidly gathering to celebrate his power. Instead, Peter reminds them of the great sin they committed in killing "the Holy and Righteous One." He points out how, even when Pilate gave them a way out of their stupid and destructive behavior, they refused it. Peter repeats, "you denied" Jesus. We are likewise called out for our sins. We ignorantly destroy what we do not understand and whomever gets in the way of our doing what we want. Even when we are offered a path to stop global warming, to welcome asylum seekers or to give everyone access to health care, we willfully deny it. But God is the author of life for all, not just for some. So Peter emphasizes that God forgives us and uses suffering to bring about resurrection anyway. Why in the world would God do this? Because that is who God is. Our salvation is completely undeserved and gratuitous! Jesus is the author of life. If we can "repent... and be converted," God will make "seasons of refreshment and relief" abundantly available to us (vs. 20). The springtime of our souls awaits us; will we enter into it or remain in the cold of winter?

- ❖ What keeps you from entering into the springtime of the resurrection?
- ❖ Where is resurrection happening around you? In you?