

3 Easter 2003
"He's Really, *Really* Risen"
The Rev. Thomas W Simmons

Alleluia! Alleluia! I love to say Alleluia! It is a beautiful word, isn't it? I love the way it rolls off the tongue. It's very pleasing to the ear. It is also pleasing to the heart and mind, for it is a joyous word, a word that connotes peace, and fulfillment, excitement and hope. These are good things.

Alleluia tells us that it's Easter, doesn't it? After 40 long days of the fasting and penitence of Lent, we have now emerged into the light, excitement and joy of Easter. He is risen! Alleluia.

During this season of Easter we get to participate in the story of the Resurrection and the events that followed. **We get to put ourselves back in that time.** And what a time it must have been! Just think of the hopelessness, anger and disappointment engulfing the disciples after Jesus' death, before the reality of the resurrection had fully dawned upon them.

Our gospel reading puts us right in the middle of it, in the Upper Room, where the disciples have gathered hoping for some news. The rumors are flying that Jesus was not in the tomb, that he is risen. **But no one knows if the rumors are true.**

They are all scratching their heads, full of mixed emotions, feeling sorrow yet some slight glimmers of hope that are perhaps too good to be true. The disciples are talking, perhaps arguing, about these things. Everyone's wondering **WHAT THE HECK** is going on.

Suddenly, the room changes. There is a new presence. They look around. Is that Jesus? **Jesus has appeared to them as if by some sort of magic.** As this new reality dawns upon them, they struggle with disbelief, fear and amazement. Luke tells us they were "startled and terrified". You can certainly imagine why. Is this a ghost, or some hallucination...or is it one of Saddam's body doubles?

No, it's Jesus. And he meets them where they are, asking "Why do doubts arise in your hearts?" He then offers them conclusive proof of his resurrection, that **it's real, REALLY real.** Touch and see. He eats a meal with them. He has indeed risen, bodily, physically, entirely from the dead. This is not the ghost of Jesus or the spirit of Jesus. He is Jesus. He is risen.

The faith that is taking shape in his disciples and in the Church is **not an airy-fairy, abstract "spiritualistic" religion,** floating on clouds playing harps. It is corporeal, physical and embraces every aspect of our lives and experience as human beings.

It embraces and redeems the whole WORLD. There is not aspect of reality that it does not embody and embrace and transform. Death has been defeated, physical creation has been redeemed. Eternal life is now being experienced in our daily lives. Heaven and earth meet in Jesus.

So Jesus addresses the disciple's doubt by offering them his body. But he does more. **He also gives them a Bible study** to demonstrate that this event is not just an exciting moment of time, a private experience to be shared amongst them. You know, "Like, wow, check it out!"

Jesus connects himself and the events of recent days to the Scripture, the ancient tradition stretching back for millennia into the mists of human memory. He showed them how "everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."

Christ declares HIMSELF to be the very heart and core of the Old Testament, the personal fulfillment of it. All those ancient writings look to and anticipate HIS person and his work. "The Word has been made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory."

So Jesus addresses the disciple's doubt and helps them grasp the reality of his resurrection by **offering his risen flesh and the written Word as proof.** This experience of Christ in the upper room set the pattern for subsequent encounters with him in the Christian community.

When we gather as the Church we still experience him in the reading and preaching of Scripture and in the community meal with Christ, the Eucharist. This is where we get the structure of the Liturgy: Word and Sacrament.

Jesus concludes his meeting by sending the disciples as "witnesses of these things." He's not content to connect himself to the past in the ancient traditions of Holy Scripture. He also connects himself into the future and the whole world and all the people in it. So **he sends the disciples into the world to tell others** what they have seen and heard. That's what we see in the other readings appointed for today.

In Acts Peter and John are bearing witness to the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel that has arrested them for their preaching. This same group had tried Jesus about six weeks earlier and had him put to death. They want to preserve their power, and this "Jesus movement" is a direct threat. They must stop it NOW. They killed Jesus and now they're considering what to do about his disciples who are claiming that he has risen from the dead.

Well, Peter responds to their questions by putting Jesus' resurrection right in their face. **He tells them that it's real. It's REALLY real.** Like Jesus, Peter presents incontrovertible proof of his resurrection. Just look how Christ has healed this

man! He's still at it. He's still healing people. Peter is saying that Jesus is risen and active and that they'll never be able to stop him.

Just look how Peter has changed! He's gone from denying to a servant girl that he even knew Jesus on Good Friday to now boldly proclaiming him before the Sanhedrin! Jesus is really risen and Peter's transformation is further proof of it.

Then we see John several decades later in our epistle reading this morning. He was with Peter on that day in Jerusalem, many years ago boldly proclaiming Christ. But now times have changed and he is addressing a church struggling with unbelief and dissent and theological controversy within its ranks.

A heretical doctrine called Gnosticism had arisen that claimed the Jesus was a spirit, denying his physical life and existence - that existence so powerfully revealed in the upper room.

John addresses that silly notion by recalling that night in the upper room, when Christ appeared to them, and I just love his emphatic repetitiousness as he tells the story. "We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands...we have seen it and testify to it...and declare to you what we have seen and heard."

I don't think the great old apostle is repeating himself because he's having a senior moment. He's trying to get a simple point across to a new generation of Christians for whom this whole Jesus thing has become very abstract. **It's real. It's REALLY real.** Jesus Christ is risen. He's not some ghost or spiritual entity floating about.

Because Jesus is really risen from the dead the light of God shines in the world and we can walk in that light. Because Jesus is risen from the dead "we have an Advocate - a defense attorney - with the Father" who assures our acquittal and the forgiveness for our sins. Because he is risen we have fellowship with the Father and the Son and with each other in Christ.

That's the good news that Luke and Peter and John proclaim to us this morning. It's all real. It's REALLY real. Jesus is really risen. That's why we say Alleluia And that's why we are gathered here this morning, to remember that fact and to celebrate it and to allow it to change our lives like it did the disciples.

The truly remarkable, really real reality of the resurrection is that just as Jesus appeared in the midst of his disciples gathered in the Upper Room so long ago, so he's in our midst today. Jesus is here with us today, manifesting himself in the Word and Meal. All we have to do is listen and come and receive. Alleluia. AMEN