

You are Witnesses

Faith Resurrected: Part 2 “You are Witnesses”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – April 18, 2021

3rd Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36-48

Reflection: Psalm 4

Greeting: Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Prayer: Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 4

Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer. How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him. When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, “O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!” You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound. I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety. (Psalm 4 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 4 and we hear a call to the Lord. That God hears our prayers, and that we need to remember this in times of distress. What kind of gladness has the Lord put in your heart? What safety do you find in God’s love? How do you extend that feeling to others? How do we share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

Prayer: O God, our rainbow, and our dove, our promised land: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your ark. Protect us from storms, and ferry us to your welcoming shore; hear our prayers and have mercy, through Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 3, verses 12 through 19.

When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. (Acts 3:12-19 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from 1 John chapter 3, verse 1 through 7.

See 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 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. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. (1 John 3:1-7 NRSV)*

Our last reading is from Luke chapter 24, verses 36 through 48.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 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. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then 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. (Luke 24:36-48 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We continue our Easter series entitled “Faith Resurrected” with our next message “You are Witnesses.” Every message in this series is going to be using a phrase from the Gospel reading for that week. In our readings for today, we get a message about what it means to be a witness. In our gospel reading, Jesus talks to the disciples after appearing to them. In Luke’s account, he shows himself to them and goes through some of the same things we saw last week in John’s account. He shows them his hands and his feet, and he says you can touch me, and see me, you can feel me. And just to go the extra mile to convince them, he asks for something to eat, because ghosts don’t eat. But it’s what he says to them after showing himself to them. He says that he wants them to understand that everything he’s already told them about the law and the prophets, everything that was written must be fulfilled. He explains the Messiah had to suffer, die, and rise on the third day, so that all could be forgiven. And what he sets them out to do is to go and proclaim this to everybody. Let everyone know forgiveness of sins is open to all. And then he tells them something important. You are witnesses of these things. They can proclaim it because they’ve seen it and they know it. But in the same way, this has happened to us, because it’s something that we know that we have been witnesses to as well. Now, we may not have seen the risen Christ’s hands and his feet. He may not have sat down with us and asked us for a piece of fish, but in the same way we are witnesses to his saving grace. We are witnesses to the life that can be lived in him.

One of the focuses in all of our readings for today is about being a witness so that others may repent. And I think we have to talk about what that means. Because sometimes the word itself becomes a little heavy handed and hard to grasp. But really it means to recognize when you’re going the wrong way and turn around. If you’re on the wrong path, if you’re walking in the wrong direction your life, declare that you’re walking in the wrong direction and turn around. If you’re doing what’s wrong, recognize it, ask for forgiveness, and do what’s right. Because repentance is about this idea of changing what you’re doing, changing your life. Because it’s not just saying, I’m sorry for what I’m doing, but it’s saying, I’m sorry for what I’m doing, and I want to do better. I want to end doing wrong, and I want to do right.

We see Peter bearing witness to this after a long address to the people. That Peter offers up grace to the people listening. That even those who thought Jesus was not the Messiah, he basically says to them, you know what, it’s all right because you didn’t know, and now you do. You were ignorant, but now you’re not. And now that you’re not ignorant you have a choice to make. Now that you know, what will you do? Peter is a witness of what has happened. And Peter is bearing witness to them to say, hey, you have a chance. You can continue to turn away from God, or you can turn to God. What’s it going to be? And I think that this grace is important for us to recognize. But it’s also important for us to recognize what it

means to be a witness and call for repentance. That if we're going to be witnesses of the power that Christ has to change lives, we have to bear witness to that change. And part of that is showing that in ourselves. But it also means showing that same love and that same grace. When we see Peter offering up grace to the people who helped to condemn Christ to death, we see him offering up that grace because they didn't know any better. But now that they do, they have a choice. And the choice is to do good or not. And so, they have this back and forth thing that you have the option of whether or not you want to do good. You have the option of whether or not you want to seek justice. You have the option of whether or not you want to walk in Christ.

But it can't be halfhearted. We can't say I'm going to kind of walk in Christ. You can't say well I'm just going to keep asking for forgiveness and keep doing the same things over and over that I know were wrong, because Christ is going to bail me out. Because that ignores the idea of repentance. And it means that we're not being witnesses at that point. Because then our witnesses that Christ doesn't care what we do with our lives. But if that were true, then it means that we don't care what Christ taught. Then we aren't being the people of Christ, sharing the good news. We are people just looking for an easy way out. Thing is that it's not easy. It's not the way that sometimes think of where you just ask for forgiveness and you're forgiven while you keep doing what you're doing. Because the power that Christ is the power to change our lives. Because the way that Christ is a witness to others is through us and through the way that our lives are changed, the way that we become more generous in Christ, the way that we become more caring in Christ, the way that we become more loving in Christ. The way that we live our lives is a testimony to the power that Christ has had in our lives. We have to have that. Because if we don't change our lives then we really aren't listening to what Christ has told us.

We often take the half step to repentance. We ask to be forgiven, but we don't change what it is that causes us to need to be forgiven. And that's what repentance is. We admit our wrongs, we declare our feelings, and then we try to change them. On the flip side of that does that mean that you're going to be able to do everything perfectly from that point on, that you'll never fail again? That's the goal. But it's not always the outcome. We face many temptations. Sometimes we slip. Often, we slip. Because though we want to be perfected in God's love, so that we can live a life that is righteous and blameless, we don't always live up to that. And until we reach that point, then we have to seek the forgiveness offered to us and repent. Because even our repentance is bearing witness to Christ's love, because when we do so we show others that it's possible to change. That it's possible to walk away from the temptation. That it's possible to walk away from greed. That it's possible to walk away from lust. That it's possible to walk away from oppression. That it's possible to walk away from hate and to live a life in love. Because grace is open to all. And because Christ is open to all, we must ourselves offer grace to all. That if we believe that all things are made complete in Christ, then we may be made complete in Christ. And that all people may be made complete in Christ.

What that means for us as Christians is that we always hold the door open. Because, though we turn from sin, we do not turn away from those in need. And that's sometimes where the difficulty lies. Are there going to be times where we have to turn away from people because of the influence they have on our lives to make us go the wrong way? Yes. But we also have to remember that even that act, as long as we can declare why, is an act of bearing witness to Christ, because we're saying that we can't live our lives in Christ if we're being pulled into the darkness. No, we have to walk to the light. The thing is though is that we never want to leave someone behind in the darkness. We want them to follow us to the light. Which is why we always have to have our hearts open to forgive others. That we ask to be forgiven just as we are willing to forgive others. That we are willing to repent of our sins to be able to show others that they could repent as well. Because we are the example, so that people may see us, and they may witness Christ's love in our actions. And when they witness Christ in us, it opens the door for them to be able to change and to be a witness to others.

So never forget you are a witness of these things. You are a witness to Christ's love and mercy, to the grace of God, to the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to change hearts and transform lives. To be a beacon to what is good and what is right. And it never means rejecting people. Because we are called to be a witness to all people, so that all people may know that God's love and grace is open to them. It means that we demonstrate it by leading a life that walks in Christ's footsteps. That we lead a life lived in our risen Savior. That we share in the hope we find in the resurrection, that that new life, that new birth, is open to all who are willing to seek it. And that we are never the ones to close that door on others.

So, bear witness with your life to Christ's love. Bear witness to Christ's death and Christ's resurrection, and share the good news that all may seek forgiveness. That all may walk in the light. That all may seek the love and the guidance that Christ gives us. And let us always show this by being a witness, by being an example of the transforming power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: We are reluctant, O Author of Love, to set aside our hurt, our anger, our disappointment. Heal us with your tender touch, that we might be cleansed of all unclean thoughts, all schemes of revenge, all hope of vindictive retribution. Open our eyes to the power of love, shown to us in the unselfish sacrifice of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Faith Resurrected

Our series is *Faith Resurrected*, and each week's title is taken from the words of Christ as we explore what it means to serve a Risen Savior.

April 11th – *Come to Believe* - Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 18th – *You are Witnesses* – Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 25th – *Listen to My Voice* – Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

May 2nd – *Abide in Me* – Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

May 9th – *I Chose You* – Acts 10:44-48; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

May 16th – *Be Sanctified* – Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

May 23rd – *He Will Guide You* – Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Trinity Powers
Lauren Stewart	Charlie Henderson	Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Family of Davey Yaw	Family of Wilma Clark
Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Hugh Eubank	Shelby Murphy
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Mary White	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Donna Graham	Kevin Drum	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Kim Hennes

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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