

Easter 2C
Readings: Acts 5:27-32

The Rev. Dr. Darcy Williams @ Emmanuel, Chestertown
Psalm 150 Rev 1:4-8

24 April 2022
John 20:19-31

These 50 days from Easter Sunday through Pentecost are a time of celebration for the church. The introspection and solemnity of Lent and Good Friday are replaced by the joy of the Resurrection, and the knowledge that death did not have the final word. Christ is risen!

Two+ years of very real concerns for our health in the midst of COVID pandemic kept people home. Even as we got vaccinated and boosted, many still hesitated to be inside with those not in their family bubble. But last Sunday was amazing! Having 221 people attend services attend Easter services here was an occasion for pure joy and ecclesiastic exuberance! Walking into church today, we are still surrounded by the beauty of Easter Sunday. Our senses of sight and smell are flooded with stunning floral displays and the sweet fragrance of the lilies. But after the excitement of joyous proclamations of Alleluias sung and said, families visiting, and Easter Sunday surprises, there is a certain let down today.

Maybe it is the realization that we are very much like the disciples. We too struggle with doubt, even as we proclaim our faith. We can easily put ourselves into the disciples' places. We understand their all too human reactions. Fearful for their own lives, fearful that the religious and civil authorities who put Jesus to death would decide to also arrest them and put an end to the Jesus movement, they hid. It was much easier to wall themselves off from the world than to take the risk. We understand all too well this fear of taking a chance and risking one's life. Two plus years of COVID have taught us that.

And we understand their doubt. Living in a world shattered by what we see happening in Ukraine, by continued violence on our city streets, and by the attempts of some to undermine our democracy and to oppress the rights of others, makes us doubt that God is listening to our prayers. We want to believe the peace of God that Jesus promises will conquer all the evil we see in the world. We want to believe that the resurrection life that we proclaimed so loudly last week will lead the way to a world where the peace of God reigns supreme. We want a world where the violence of war such as we are witnessing in Ukraine is relegated to the history books. We want the assurance that our prayers are being heard, and our efforts to do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly with our God will make a difference.

So we come back to scripture looking for the answers to our fears and our doubts. As we reread the lessons for today we begin to realize that they are very much about faith, hope, love, and our rebirth in resurrection life. Peter and the apostles who only weeks earlier hid in the Upper Room, now stood before the high priests and council of elders proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God sent to lead and save Israel. Thomas who doubted the tales of his fellow disciples, came to believe. These are stories of faith, the faith described in Scripture as "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" They are part of the vast treasure trove of stories of faith we have in the Bible – faith that allowed Noah to build the ark, Moses to lead the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt, and Peter to rush out to the streets on the first Pentecost preaching the word of God and baptizing thousands.

When Jesus appeared with the disciples that first night, in the Upper Room, their faith was revived. All their hopes and dreams were restored. God's love as known to them in Jesus, flowed

through the room, and they were reborn in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. When he returned a week later, they knew their faith was justified, and God's message of redemption exemplified in Jesus prevailed. There were no recriminations for falling asleep in the garden. No recriminations for denying they were Jesus' followers. No recriminations for not standing at the foot of the cross. No recriminations for hiding in the Upper Room. Only peace, love, and hope flowed from Jesus into their hearts. New life arose where loss, fear and despair had been before. The evangelist John tells us that *“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”*

It is in that resurrected life that we too walk. Author Dan Clendenin writes that it means walking with a sense of hope for the future that *“is presently unseen. But this future hope isn't a cop-out or a fantasy that makes us withdraw from the world; it's a concrete orientation that shapes everything we do and are.”*ⁱⁱⁱ He compares it to the hope that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky holds out for his country and how that hope in a what seems to be a hopeless situation exerts such a powerful force.

We walk in the power of God's love with hope for a better future for this world. When we let that love wash over and renew us, we are empowered to work in faith for that better world. We are invited to get out from behind our closed doors and to choose life. As we witness the power of God's creative spirit in the renewing of the earth each spring, we also find ourselves renewed in the power of God's love and gifts of hope and joy. We are invited to sing God's praises with the psalmist: praising God for his mighty acts and greatness, praising him with lyre and harp, with timbrel and dance, with strings and pipes, loud clanging cymbals and the ram's horn's blast! We are called to make a difference even when we don't see immediate results

Let us step out from behind our closed doors and into the sunlight of God's redeeming grace and unfathomable love. It is God's gift to us. All we have to do is open the door and let God in. Amen.

ⁱ Dan Clendenin, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3370>