

Acts 3:12-19; Luke 24:36b-48; Easter 3B; 4/18/21
Pastor Ellen Schoepf

It seems to me that over the past few years we have faced more than our share of shocking, explosive events. And, as we again have just seen yet another murder, by a police officer, of an African American man, I simply pray that we take a good look at ourselves as people and address our own issues which are multiple. Almost all the shocking events that take place in our country are rooted in racism which is truly America's original sin, and we must face this and work for change. Shocking, explosive events often bring about change, change to both people and communities, and hopefully they bring about the kind of change that makes for **better** communities and societies. Hopefully, we can be the kind of people that work for the kind of transformational, healing change that needs to take place.

As we continue to celebrate Easter, **we** gather because of a shocking, explosive event that changed the world, the resurrection of Christ. In today's readings we hear about shocking, explosive events. In our reading from Acts, a shocking event has drawn the people to the temple, a shocking event that centered around **healing**. A crippled beggar who was a constant presence at the temple's Beautiful Gate had been dramatically and unexpectedly healed in the name of Jesus. In response to

this event, an astonished and puzzled throng of Israelite people pack into the area of the temple known as Solomon's Portico, pressing around Peter and John, the men who seemed to be the source of the miracle. So, Peter takes this opportunity to give a short sermon about Jesus. Peter says, "You've got it wrong. Do you really think that it was *our* power, *our* clever wisdom that healed this man? This is **not** about us. This is about **God**. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the one **true** healer." Peter tells them it was **Jesus' name** itself that healed the lame man. And guess what? The people do not understand. Then Peter proceeds to tell them that **their** public rejection of Jesus before Pilate was the reason Jesus was killed. Peter is very candid and asks the people to take a close look at themselves. Peter bluntly declares Jesus was killed because **they** had rejected him. And then, after saying this, Peter does something **astonishing**, I would even say **shocking**. Peter communicates the **good** news of the life-giving **grace** of God as he lets the Israelites off the hook and says **God** was in charge all along. He goes on to bear witness to the Risen Christ. He bears witness to an Easter world where "the **healing** and **forgiving** power of God is as pervasive and present as sunshine and rain."

(Feasting on the Word, p. 410)

Peter bears a powerful **witness** to the Risen Christ because he, himself, had experienced an astonishing, explosive event, the **healing** and **forgiving** power of God's life-giving, gracious presence. **He, himself**, had experienced the major, disruptive, life-changing **grace** of God when Jesus had let **him** off the hook. Peter himself had been **eastered**, as Walter Brueggemann would describe it. Remember, Peter was the one who had denied Jesus three times and then deserted him during the crucifixion. And, in today's gospel reading from Luke, we are told that after the resurrection, Peter and the other disciples lived in fear behind closed doors, afraid that the authorities would come after **them**. There had been some strange reports of "Jesus sightings" by the women and those two disciples who had journeyed to Emmaus, but the rest of them still had trouble believing what they had been told. As we heard last week, they gathered in Jerusalem and remained behind locked doors, immersed in fear while experiencing a gamut of emotions. They undoubtedly felt guilt, doubt, anxiety, suspicion, distrust, and maybe even terror. Their leader was dead and his bloody and wounded body was missing! Then suddenly, out of nowhere, Jesus had appeared in their midst saying, "Peace be with you." And, even **then**, they simply could not believe. The writer of Luke's gospel says, "While in their joy they were **disbelieving** and **still wondering....!**"

Well, it had taken **more** than a simple appearance by Jesus to convince Peter and the other disciples that Jesus was truly alive. This news was so shocking and explosive they simply could not absorb what had happened. They had wondered if they were seeing a ghost, so Jesus did something truly astonishing. Jesus asked them if they had anything to eat. The writer of Luke seems intent upon making it very clear that the raised Jesus is truly a bodily Jesus. They offered him a piece of broiled fish and **he ate it!** Now, a supposed ghost does **not** eat food. Then, the disciples finally realized that this post-resurrection Jesus indeed was flesh and blood and bones!! This astonishing, explosive event really **eastered** the disciples, and they were forever changed!

After eating, Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to further understand the scriptures and then commissioned them to proclaim the good news of **repentance** and **forgiveness** of sins in **his** name to all the nations. Jesus then told them, "**You** are witnesses of these things!"

Through these experiences of the **forgiveness** and **grace** shown to them by the risen Lord Jesus, Peter and the others finally believed and understood. **They had been eastered!** Jesus had opened their minds and hearts and, in doing so, set them **free** from their fear and **all** that held them captive. And, released from **his** fear, Peter began to bear **witness** to the

Risen Christ. He began to bear witness to the Risen Lord and, as we heard in our reading from Acts, he communicated the same **forgiveness** and **grace** that Jesus had given him. He communicated the grace of the Risen Jesus and people began living into an Easter world. **The people were eastered!**

So, I ask **you** today, what holds you back from bearing such witness? Is it fear, or guilt, or anger, or a sense of not feeling adequate? What imprisons **you** in a locked room? Have **you** seen and experienced the Risen Christ in our midst? The Risen Christ **is** present to each one of us and is saying, "Peace be with you." And, God invites each one of us to live into an **Easter** world, just as he did Peter. God invites us to be witnesses to all that God is about – God's intention to bring peace, unity, harmony, love, compassion, grace, justice, and mercy to a world that is so broken and sinful. Today, I ask that each of us think about what **our communal** response to Christ's presence in our lives looks like, both here in this community, and also in the greater world? Just as Jesus commissioned the disciples, Jesus commissions **us to declare the presence and power of God** in the depth of not only **our** brokenness but also the world's brokenness.

Christ makes God's own self known to us in ways that are large and small. The good news to us is **astonishing!** God, in the risen Christ, has defeated death and we do not need to live in fear! This is explosive, life-giving news! And, as people of faith, **we** are each called to bear witness to the Risen Christ. We are called to be witnesses to Christ's presence among us, not only through the words we speak, but also through our deeds, through the actions we take and the way we live in relationship to **all others**, to those who are different from us, to those whose ethnicity is different from ours, to our African American sisters and brothers, to immigrants who come simply seeking safety. To be a witness to the risen Christ is to give our whole lives as evidence. Priest and author Henri Nouwen suggests that at the end of each day we ask ourselves these questions: "Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of **healing**? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love?" "These are the real questions," Fr. Nouwen writes. "I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come."

Friends, **we have been eastered!** We are called to **be Easter** people. Our faith demands nothing less. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!