

## **Easter 3 – B 04/14/2024**

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> 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 <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:45-48

But what had to happen in order for the disciples’ minds to be opened? Jesus had first addressed them with ‘Peace be with you’. This peace in Hebrew is shalom. Shalom is more than just no stress or anxiety. It is about a well-being from the inside out. Jesus was sharing his peace with them and inviting them into it.

As a community of faith, we experience anxiety especially in times of transition and change. We have been getting to know each other. There was an initial meeting by zoom with the council. My live introduction to you was the weekend of the Green Team Sunday last April. I had met some of the leadership on that Saturday night. I was introduced to the congregation, and I believe I read a lesson and participated in the distribution of Holy Communion.

Oh yes, I sang with the choir. After the service was a congregational meeting. While the congregation voted I waited in the library. I waited and waited, and it may have been Addie who went by on her way out and gave me a thumbs up. Thus, it was a positive vote. I thought it was okay then to go back out to meet those who were going out to lunch with me.

There was a bit of anxiety until I had the thumbs up. This is all normal. We can say God’s will be done, but as humans there can always be doubt or anxiety. We have taken this time of transition on together and are making great progress.

The transition team has reviewed the demographics provided for us by Pastor David Sprang from our synod staff. Thanks to Rich, we are able to see those demographics scrolling in the narthex. We have also been formulating our gifts from our “Conversation With the Congregation”. This past week a few members of the Transition Team met with Katie Love to hear more specifically about the needs of our community. At our next team meeting we will formulate goals to present to you on Sunday, May 5.

This takes a great deal of work, but our transition team is working hard through this process. We continue to learn, and many connections are being made as our system here is beginning to reform. This will mean changes, but it is still a work in process. This can create anxiety, and this is normal. Without some anxiety

or doubt, we don't ask the questions in which to learn about ourselves and God's will.

Let's see what Jesus used to calm the anxieties of the disciples. We already mentioned the shalom peace that he offered to them. They thought Jesus was a ghost and he said look at my hands and my feet. Touch me and see, if you need to, as a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

Jesus could see that they were still not sure, even though there was some joy expressed. Thus, he asked them for a piece of fish that was prepared over a fire. They had had many meals with Jesus. One that they probably remembered was the feeding of the 5,000 men, besides women and children where there was 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Also, the story before our Gospel lesson this morning, is the Walk to Emmaus where Jesus broke bread at the end of the day and their hearts were burning as they had experienced Jesus' presence. They knew in that familiar meal, that this was Jesus, their risen Messiah. It is in the familiar that that they and we find peace in the midst of anxiety.

Consider what we do here on Sunday morning. We hear the Word and receive the sacrament, Jesus. This is where we can find peace. It is familiar. It is one place where we encounter Jesus through Word, Sacrament, music and each other. This is why if there are too many things different in worship we feel a little uncomfortable. I'm not saying it isn't healthy for us to do new things, but too many at one time and our uncomfortableness can become a hinderance in having open minds to understand the scriptures.

Jesus also reminded the disciples of what they had learned from their Jewish faith through the law given to Moses, the prophets, the Psalms and what Jesus, himself had taught them. He said, thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and the repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Jesus tells them that they are witnesses of these things.

Again, Jesus was bringing the familiar stories back to their memories. He was pointing out that what he said would happen to him had happened. Then in a sense we have Luke's Great commission. Now it is the disciple's call to proclaim in Jesus' name repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations beginning with Jerusalem.

They are called to be witnesses or a record of these things that they have learned, seen and experienced. This does not mean that they won't have anxiety and doubts, but that their minds will be more open to understand the scriptures in

the light of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus had been reframing the law given to Moses and the prophets in all of his teaching.

The Greek word for understand is soon-ee'-ay-mee which means to bring together, which for the disciples meant everything that they learned in their Jewish faith and what Jesus had been teaching them. It is about seeing how all of it connects. This could only begin to happen when they could trust Jesus.

That is when anxiety decreases, when we realize that there is a person whom we can trust. Is that not the reason we come here on Sunday to be reminded of how much God loves all people? Even though we may have heard the Biblical stories before through our three year lectionary cycle, when our minds are open we can hear something different every time.

This is the process that the transition team is going through and which you have been invited into and have participated. Remember I just said that connections were being made as we processed through Who we are, in other words how God has gifted us; and Who our neighbor is by reviewing demographics and meeting with Katie, and now we are working on What is God calling us to do.

The more open that we are, the more that God in Jesus Christ can reveal to us. There is an energy here that the Holy Spirit is creating to move forward. It can be exciting and yet create anxiety all at the same time. The key is for us, as it was for the disciples, is whom we place our trust.

We come back again to where is our mind and heart are focused. Today we gather to sing praises, hear the Word and share in the sacrament. I always believe that Jesus has something for us to hear every time that we gather together. How much we hear is based on letting go of those things that bring us anxiety. Jesus greets us today with 'Peace be with you'. He offers us shalom, inviting us to rest in him.

We are challenged, as the disciples were to go out and be witnesses to that which we have heard and experienced here. Being witnesses is tapping into the source which is in within us.

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened our minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and he says to us, "You have heard the message that was written, that the Messiah was to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be proclaimed in his name to our neighbors, beginning in Okemos, Williamston and..... <sup>48</sup> Jesus says to us today you are my witnesses.

Let us pray: Great God you have called us to be witnesses here in this place and neighborhood. May your Spirit continue to help us rest in your peace that our anxiety and doubt may be in the background that our minds may be open to understand your scriptures and your direction for us. You give us what we need to do your ministry here in this place, in our neighborhood. May your Spirit continually help us to tap into the tools and the energy that you provide for us to be your witnesses. In Jesus' name, Amen