

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

At first glance, the disciples in our gospel this morning seem strangely silent, even inactive as participants as to what is happening. That is at first glance. Keep in mind, the disciples are together in a room somewhere, two of Jesus' followers, Cleopas and one who is unnamed have been on the road to Emmaus where the risen Jesus had appeared to them. They rush back, find that Jesus has also appeared to Simon Peter, and share their story. As they talk, Jesus appears.

So consider what I said a moment ago about the disciples seeming silent and inactive. That is a descriptive observation, not judgmental. I think of them as accepting in a very human way the mystery, the wonder of the events that have occurred the past few days.

God and God alone can do what is at the center, the heart of the Easter story, their Understanding is not critical to the story. When we ourselves hear the Easter story, when we accept it as formative, then we have the privilege, the responsibility, the call from God, the opportunity, to witness as to how it shapes our very lives.

Our call from God to witness is indeed a privilege, a responsibility, and an opportunity.

So just what are we to be witnesses to? And even more to the point perhaps, how do you witness to something that happened roughly two thousand years before you were born? I like to refer to the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, and the way that the Jewish people celebrate the Passover even now, and have celebrated it for much more than two thousand years.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel writes in the book "A Passover Haggadah" that "In every generation, every individual must feel as if he personally had come out of Egypt. As the Bible says 'And you shall tell your son on that day, it is because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt.'"

This is the way we should think about, talk about, and live about, what Jesus did for us. The Messiah suffered and rose from the dead on the third day, for me. For me as an individual, repentance and forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed, lived, in his name to all nations. I am a witness to what he did for me. You are a witness to what Jesus did for you. The resurrection is not something that we mention in passing as an interesting story, and a biblical anecdote of some kind, instead it is informative, it is basic to what we believe, it informs our faith. Jesus died for me, he died for you, by grace through faith my sins, your sins, are forgiven. And this is what we live.

We are not perfect, we will sin throughout our lives, but we are not to be known by our sins. We are to be known by our faith, by our living as witnesses to our faith.

The Easter story shapes our lives and we are to witness to that shaping. We feed the hungry, we visit those imprisoned, we comfort those who mourn with the comfort that we ourselves have received, we spend time with and help those who are ill, infirm or in need. We give of ourselves and we give of all that God has given us, whether we donate clothing, or whether we actually cart the donated clothing to a place where those in need can get what is necessary. There are so many ways we witness to the resurrection, not only in telling the story of what Jesus did for us, but in living it.

We also simply spend time with Jesus, perhaps in savoring those times when we ourselves receive more than we give. We worship, now and throughout our lives because it glorifies God, it strengthens us for service as we are fed with the Word, and because it is pleasurable. We believe that life triumphs over death, that we are forgiven and that forgiveness opens doors that are securely closed and locked.

We witness in our study of the Word, in our devotions and our daily Bible reading, where we have the joy of experiencing Jesus, where we are again strengthened and comforted and light is shed upon our paths. We share that familiar story and constantly find it new and renewing, comfortable yet exciting. We share that familiar story through the way we live our lives, imitating and following Jesus.

Last week I talked about the disciple we often think of as “Doubting Thomas,” and you will find in our gospel today a touch of the same, the disciples are incredulous, frightened, doubting, joyful yet disbelieving and wondering at the same time. It is too good to be true, it cannot be! You can almost hear their thoughts as we ponder this story. Yet it is comforting to think of it, the disciples verify by sight and touch what we accept by faith, even as we ask our questions.

We are witnesses to the resurrection and we, like those gathered that night with Jesus, have been told by him that we are his witnesses, and so he sends, propels us out into the world to live the faith and forgiveness we have each one of us received. We witness then, in our serving, this is at the heart of who and what we are, we serve and as we serve we receive so much more than we give, and the truth is that the deepest longings of our souls are expressed when we serve.

My dear ones, we spread the truth of God through our witness, through the lives of those we touch by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as we do, as you have heard before, we change the world through our witness, as the prophet Micah has said, doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly with our God. We change the world, maybe person at a time, but the world is changed. AMEN