

Easter 3, Year B

April 14, 2024

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, OH

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

Have you ever witnessed something that seemed too good to be true- something that left you stopped in your tracks to such a degree, that you were skeptical of what was plainly right in front of you? That happened to me this week. I have to admit that I did not get on board with all of the hype around the total eclipse that happened six days ago. I had never seen a total eclipse, only a partial eclipse. And a total eclipse, even if it was more impressive than the few partial eclipses I had witnessed, still did not seem to me to be cause for all of the predicted traffic and parties and school closures. But, on Monday, I picked up some eclipse glasses and headed out, not expecting much. Then, at 3:13pm, as the world around me started to grow cold and dark, I put on my eclipse glasses, and looked up. For four minutes, I stood there, speechless, in awe at this slow dance between the moon and sun, and I got it. I understood the hype. It was one of the most incredible things I have ever seen, and it is an experience I can hardly put into words. It felt and looked almost too good to be true.

In Luke's Gospel today, we hear a kind of situation that, for the disciples, was, at first, perhaps seemed too good to be true. In fact they met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, shared a meal with him, and went to tell the others what they had seen. And while they are sharing, Jesus appeared to them again (This is where we pick up with the text today.) and they are afraid. Though they had just seen

and believed and eaten with Jesus, when Jesus appears to them again, they still do not fully see or recognize him. In fact, Luke tells us they are “startled”. And Jesus’s response is not judgement. He says to them, “why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

I think Jesus recognizes and loves something in them here that is very central to the human condition- trying to trust. In this story, Jesus doesn’t get mad or frustrated at the disciples for not recognizing him the second time he appears to them. Jesus knew that fear and anxiety had probably blinded them to not be able to see the very person standing in their midst. He knew that they were still carrying a heavy load of grief after seeing him die on a cross and be laid to rest in a tomb. Jesus knew that pain also kept them from really trusting, really believing what they could see. What if they believed this to be Jesus and they then lost Jesus again? Could they go through that pain and agony a second time? In our own time and context, we might call what they were feeling “waiting on the other shoe to drop”. We experience something too good to be true, and even if we can get to the point of acceptance, we sometimes then move quickly to the place of fear of losing what we have.

Jesus knew this, and his response to his disciples is compassion. His response is void of judgement. In fact, how does he respond to his disciples being startled? He shows them his hands and feet. In response to their fear and anxiety and grief and pain, he offers himself as consolation. He offers himself as peace. He came to them a second time because he knew it might take a second time to convince them that he was back. That he was alive and well.

And then Jesus does one more marvelous thing in this story. Luke tells us that he “opened their minds”. Jesus says, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.” Jesus goes on to recount some of the things he told his disciples before he left them. He says, “Remember when I said that I must suffer and die

and then be raised from the dead? Well, you are seeing that happen before you in real time. I suffered. I died. I have been raised from the dead.” And I don’t want us to miss what happens here. Jesus takes all that he had taught them- three plus years of stories about God and God’s love and even what he himself would have to endure- he takes all that he had taught and shown them, all they had stored and kept in their minds...and he moves all of that into their hearts. He took what they knew to be true with their mind, and he made it true for them through experience- knowing by seeing and touching and hearing and breaking bread. And the same thing happens here where we break bread. In this act of sharing the feast of Christ’s body and blood, all that we have learned about through scripture and study and forums and church school becomes real for us in a piece of bread we hold in our hands and a sip of wine. We know about God through what we learn, and in the bread and wine, we know God through experience. It feels and tastes so good it is sometimes hard to believe.

Something else this week that I have found hard to believe is that in five short days, I will be made a priest right here in this space. On that spot right there, I will take vows to serve among you as priest, to join you in our work toward building up the Kingdom of God in our little corner of Cleveland. And if I really, really think about it, it’s almost hard to believe- that God has brought me back to the place where I was confirmed fifteen years ago, the place where this journey toward the priesthood started, bringing to perfection my own journey, to serve alongside you wonderful people of God. It almost feels too good to be true. I hope to see you on Friday to share in the joy of what God is doing in our midst.

The good news of Easter this: that what seems too good to be true, too amazing to be true- that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again...it is true. And the good news of Easter is that we, like the disciples, can also go from not only knowing God in our heads, but we can also know God through what we learn and

what we feel in our hearts. Jesus calls us to accept what may seem too good to be true: That God loves us and saves us just as we are. On days where that is too hard to believe, ask God for proof if you need it. Let Jesus show you his hands and his feet. Let him meet you here in bread and wine. And then take hold of the gift of life and love that God offers us in Christ. Amen.