

Third Sunday of Easter April 23 2023

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Luke 24:13-35

This week we have seen a 16 year old youth, who mistakenly went to the wrong address to pick up his siblings, shot twice by a homeowner just because he rang the wrong doorbell.

We saw a group of teens who drove up the wrong driveway in search of their friend's house, who, upon realizing the mistake and turning their cars around to leave, were shot at by the owner of the house. One of the bullets struck a 20 year old woman who later died.

We saw two teenage cheerleaders in Texas shot after one of them mistakenly opened the door to a car she thought was her own but saw a man sitting in the passenger seat. She stepped out, tried to apologize but the man pulled a gun and as they left began shooting. He hit the two women seriously injuring one of them.

After this week, anyone a little nervous to distribute bags for the Ely Community Food Drive in a few weeks? God help us I've actually had that thought. If a young man can be shot just for coming to the wrong door. With no words spoken, then what about the rest of us?

Two disciples, Cleopas and his partner, were walking to Emmaus a good couple of hours west and a little bit north of Jerusalem. They have heard the reports of the resurrection from the women and the reports of the empty tomb from the other disciples but it's too fantastic. They believe that the run of Jesus is over. They are going home, deeply saddened by Jesus' death, their hopes dashed.

Yet, they welcome this stranger who appears to them as they go on the way. They freely talk with him as they travel and at the end invite this stranger to stay with them. They provide hospitality because that is what has been ingrained in them by their culture. Because to travel at night in that time was dangerous for a whole host of reasons. They almost forcefully say, “No, please, stay with us because it’s getting dark. Come, eat and rest.” All of this for a total stranger.

I’m willing to make the argument that life in first century Palestine was much more dangerous than life is now. That, objectively, you had more to fear from people then than you do now. Especially strangers. Yet, hospitality, welcome, was extended regularly to people you didn’t know. Culturally ingrained for sure- you can see the expectation of hospitality and care for even your enemies throughout the Hebrew scriptures- but also ingrained by their time with Jesus. Who met with everyone, who fed the hungry, who sat at the table with people of all socio-economic backgrounds and beliefs, those who agreed with him and those who opposed him. Who tells his disciples in Matthew 25 that when you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, you do it to Jesus. That’s me, he says.

When did we become so afraid of one another that we feel compelled to bring a gun when someone knocks on our door at 10 pm. That without a word being exchanged, we shoot them. That when someone gets in our car accidentally and they step back out apologizing, we shoot. That when they come up our drive and we don’t recognize them, when they turn to leave, we shoot.

Somehow, instead of welcoming the stranger, we have been taught to fear them. Someone has taught us to demonize strangers. See anyone different from us,

who is not “us” as a threat to us and our life. At best, this attitude breaks the 8th commandment which says that we are not to bear false witness against our neighbor. Instead, we are to see what others do in the best possible light. To get curious about them, who they are, what their experiences are. To maintain our relationship with them, as Jesus did.

At worst, when we send the stranger on their way with gunshots, or even just a look, or threatening words, we not only risk committing murder, or harming one who is created in the image of God, we risk missing Jesus.

Because that is what the two disciples on the road to Emmaus found. When they sit to eat with this stranger from the road, when he blesses and breaks the bread for them to eat, they recognize who it is. The same one who they sat at table with so many times. Jesus, who fed them not just with the bread of the meal at the table, but also the bread of his Word, his teaching. One that, on reflection, the disciples felt as well, “Did not our hearts burn within us when he was talking about scripture and his place in that story?” We knew who he was then! We met Jesus in the stranger on the way.

What were the first words of the angel to the Mary’s on that Easter morning? Do you remember? Do not be afraid! Something Jesus told the disciples multiple times before in the gospel.

What are the first words of Jesus to his disciples? When they were locked in their room last week afraid of what their neighbors might do to them. Was it, grab your swords in case they’re coming for you! No, it was...Peace be with you.

What was the command Jesus gave to us, his disciples after he had washed the feet of the twelve that Maundy Thursday night? Do you remember? Love one another, as I have loved you. This is how people will know you follow me by how you love one another.

Do not be afraid, peace be with you, love one another. Commands, pleas, gifts from our Lord and Savior Jesus.

When we live this way, the reign of God that we pray will come every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, becomes manifest in the world. Real. Tangible. Even for a brief moment. A place of rest, healing, love, communion.

What would the world be like, if that 84-year-old man startled from his sleep at 10 pm by an unexpected knock had answered his door and simply asked, "How can I help you?" Giving that young man who plays bass clarinet in his school's band time to recognize that he was at the wrong house and excuse himself, "Whoops, sorry, wrong house!" What would the world be like If he had not felt afraid of the young black man at his door? He would not be facing jail time and that young man would not have to live with the reality of being shot in the head and arm for no reason at all.

What would the world be like if that gentleman in New York hadn't fired at those cars as they left his driveway. But just looked out the window and thought, "Well, the noise was annoying certainly, but I guess they were in the wrong place." A 20-year-old woman would be alive and he wouldn't be in jail. Her friends would not have to deal with her dying from being shot in front of them.

What would the world be like if we listened to Jesus? Our Lord. Our Teacher. Our Rabbi. The Son of the God we say every week is the creator of all that exists. To whom we owe... everything.

What if we took seriously the command, promise, gift to not be afraid. Of one another, of sin, death, and all those forces that defy God. What if we dwelt not in fear, but the peace that Jesus brings us. A stillness and comfort so deep nothing can disturb it. What if we loved one another with the same self-less and boundless love God in Jesus has for us?

That is the world that I want to live in. Not one that is foolish, without thinking, as Jesus accuses the two on the road of being. Not a generation that is corrupt, crooked, as Peter calls it. I want to be a fool for love! Anyone with me.

The world does not have to be like this past week. Filled with the consequences of fear, hatred, sin, death. Because we have Jesus. The risen Christ.

Found in the waters of baptism. "What can we do?" asked the crowd of Peter. Repent! Change your thinking! And be baptized. Washed and changed into new people. Then you will live. Because in these waters we find Jesus.

What can we do? We can look for Jesus in the strangers we meet every day. As we travel to school and work. Down the hallways of our schools, in the mall, along the digital highway. Because Jesus has promised to be there and shown us that he is.

What can we do? Cling to Jesus who comes to us in the Word that is scripture. Immerse ourselves in the truth of scripture, not the lies of those who tell us to fear one another.

Friends, we have a new member of the Body of Christ joining us this morning. And the world I want Myles, and our confirmands, and our children, and us to live in is one filled with peace and love. One where we are not afraid of one another.

It is risky. But that is the world I want to live in. How about you?

So, friends, called by God through the waters of baptism to proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ through word and deed. Possessing the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding. Filled with the love of God in Jesus Christ. I challenge us all to go forth into the world filled not with fear, but peace. To spread love to all we meet. To embody the reality we proclaim all this season. That Christ is not dead but risen! And that death, fear, sin, do not win.

That in Christ and together, we can overcome the world. Because with God all things are possible.