

It's All About Trust Sermon for April 19, 2009

Something that's always bothered me about Easter Sunday is that all the Sundays after it seem a little pale – a little less glorious. So much buildup – so much celebration – Bring on the lilies and ring the bells! He Lives! Hallelujah! We dance for joy and feel that warm glow of a Resurrection.

And by Monday, life goes back to normal. We still love knowing that God loves us so much he sent Jesus to us, and we still appreciate that he died for us, and we're grateful that there is an amazing morning, when Mary found an empty tomb, but once the last chocolate bunny is eaten, we seem to just settle down into our routines and the luster dulls just a bit. We have a few Easter Sundays afterward to remind us of all this; but they don't quite compare – It's almost like the glow wears off. Do you feel that, too?

Imagine, then, what the disciples must have felt right after they heard about that empty tomb – they'd just spent some of the most incredible years working with their Friend and Teacher, Jesus; and they'd just been through the most horrible event to witness...the tormenting death of that very special friend. Then, there were a couple days of intense grief, and BAM! An overjoyed report that the tomb was empty and He lives! They had their own Hallelujahs and celebration I'm sure, but what about after that? What faced the disciples once the cheering was over?

Well, He'd told them this would happen – they would be alone and it would be up to them to spread the word about God and God's great love for everyone, but I'm guessing that at first, they didn't have a clue as to what they should do. They probably needed that first visit from Jesus to assure them that he hadn't left them completely high and dry. From our reading today, we know Thomas needed it – he was struggling with knowing Jesus was alive and had to touch him to get the truth; I really think he should be called "Honest Thomas" because I have a feeling the others in the same situation might have acted the same way...

But Jesus didn't leave a manual to help them go forward from this time – and they'd pretty much been hiding since the crucifixion. In the past, they'd heard so many stories from his lips – seen so many healings from his hands, participated in forgiveness of probably thousands of people within his space and yet, they were the followers – not the leader of the ministry. For the disciples, there was probably some sense of comfort in how it all worked – travel with the Rabbi, do what you're told and it's all good. But now their Leader was gone, and the future was a mystery. They were not quite ready to take over, and they had to be afraid of what would happen to them if they really took the message of an empty tomb to the streets. Jews were angry with this whole Jesus thing – it got the people worked up and everyone knew who'd been involved.

So, grieving in fearful secrecy with a limited understanding of how it all fit together, they wondered, 'What next?'

A dear pastor friend of mine often affectionately referred to the disciples as "bozos." He meant that while they were definitely devoted to Jesus and the ministry he was taking to the world, they were simple men who probably didn't have much formal education – many were workers and laborers and fishermen – and their way of doing things often required of them action more than thinking or reasoning.

Willing to follow their Teacher anywhere and loyal as bull dogs (except for a slip-up by Peter, but that's another story) the disciples selfishly demonstrated their gift for taking directions and looking out for Jesus – like holy body guards.

I also have a feeling they were discouraged, too, and maybe even a little impatient and frustrated with God. Keep in mind, they'd been told by Jesus himself that things would end up this way, but secretly, they probably hoped it would never happen the way Jesus described it. It didn't make sense. How could Yahweh just stop the flow of this ministry? Things were going so well – Jesus was reaching so many – would Yahweh really just take the Rabbi from them, and dump all this responsibility on them?

Sitting in a secret room in those days after Jesus' resurrection, it probably felt grim and overwhelming – the hope they'd felt when they learned the tomb was empty faded a little each day, and fear took over. Jesus may be alive – but he wasn't able to hang around to direct them anymore and God the Father didn't seem to be helping much either. So when it came to getting below the surface of what their role was supposed to be after the Passion of Jesus, the Christ – it's possible they felt pretty lost, and their overall confidence was at an all-time low. Real life kicked in – the glow wore off – and there wasn't any plan that they could see.

You know, this reminds me of how we feel after Easter is over. We get caught up in the preparation and significance of Holy Week and dive right into Easter Sunday with all the joy our hearts can hold – but when it comes to the reality of life – it seems to take a lot more to sustain the joy because every day living – the every day challenges of being disciples of Jesus, the Christ - is a lot harder work. We feel ill-equipped and sometimes, we feel as though no one is out there to help us. So much isn't "right" today – and like the disciples, we wonder, "Where is Yahweh and Jesus? And what are we supposed to do now as the Faithful?"

In his book "The Pressure's Off", psychologist Larry Crabb describes an incident in his past which might offer some insight to our post-Easter feelings.

"One Saturday afternoon, I decided I was a big boy and could use the bathroom without anyone's help. So I climbed the stairs, closed and locked the door behind me, and for the next few minutes felt very self-sufficient."

Then it was time to leave.

I couldn't unlock the door. I tried with every ounce of my three-year-old strength, but I couldn't do it. I panicked.

I felt again like a very little boy as the thought went through my head, "I might spend the rest of my life in this bathroom."

My parents—and likely the neighbors—heard my desperate scream.

"Are you okay?" Mother shouted through the door she couldn't open from the outside. "Did you fall? Have you hit your head?"

"I can't unlock the door!" I yelled. "Get me out of here!"

I wasn't aware of it right then, but Dad raced down the stairs, ran to the garage to find the ladder, hauled it off the hooks, and leaned it against the side of the house just beneath the bedroom window. With adult strength, he pried it open, then climbed into my prison, walked past me, and with that same strength, turned the lock and opened the door.

"Thanks, Dad," I said—and ran out to play.

He continues: That's how I thought the Christian life was supposed to work. When I get stuck in a tight place, I should do all I can to free myself. When I can't, I should pray. Then God shows up. He hears my cry—"Get me out of here! I want to play!"—and unlocks the door to the blessings I desire.

Sometimes he does. But now, no longer three years old and approaching sixty, I'm realizing the Christian life doesn't work that way. And I wonder, are any of us content with God? Do we even like him when he doesn't open the door we most want opened—when a marriage doesn't heal, when rebellious kids still rebel, when friends betray, when financial reverses threaten our comfortable way of life, when the prospect of terrorism looms, when health worsens despite much prayer, when loneliness intensifies and depression deepens, when ministries die?

God has climbed through the small window into my dark room. But he doesn't walk by me to turn the lock that I couldn't budge. Instead, he sits down on the bathroom floor and says, "Come sit with me!" He seems to think that climbing into the room to be with me matters more than letting me out to play.

I don't always see it that way. "Get me out of here!" I scream. "If you love me, unlock the door!"

Dear friend, the choice is ours. Either we can keep asking him to give us what we think will make us happy—to escape our dark room and run to the playground of blessings—or we can accept his invitation to sit with him, for now, perhaps, in darkness, and to seize the opportunity to know him better and represent him well in this difficult world.”

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Like the disciples, in our after-Easter experiences, it sometimes feels like we're sitting in a dark room waiting – we want to know the plan, we want to get out - and the essence of God's true desire for us gets lost in wondering what to do next.

While we don't have all the answers about how to live in this world without the glow of an Easter morning, maybe it's as simple as the fact that we need to trust God is still out there, guiding us through. Maybe we need to stop hiding in the room upstairs, worrying what will happen when we step outside, keeping our faith to ourselves in a nice, tidy little corner of our lives.

And maybe, just maybe, we're supposed to have those after-Easter moments of not knowing what to do – because being open to “whatever” gives God the chance to insert sharing-experiences we might never have even given thought to before. We might push ourselves more to challenge our insecurities and set our faith free to touch others. Instead of looking for more bright sparkly Easter mornings to help us feel good, living in our less-exciting, more normal situations of the daily grind can force us to bring our own glitter to the day to celebrate our renewal in the Resurrection.

Fortunately for us, the disciples eventually got out of their post-Easter slump and figured out that they already had the tools they needed to offer Jesus and the promise of eternal life with God's love to people. Jesus had taught them well, and once the grief passed, they allowed their absolute belief in the empty tomb to take over any doubts they might have had about being capable witnesses for God. Our living faith today is a testimony to strengths they developed as a group and individually, as they left the upper room, gathered new believers and worshiped a forgiving God.

And what about our post-Easter feelings? I believe we know we don't need a manual or a plan to tell us how to be Jesus for others – how to share God's shimmering Easter message. I think we just need to remember how God works – to recall how Jesus gave of himself – and then we're also called to take it to the streets, fearlessly. The glow comes from the believing and the giving – it's all about trust.

Amen.