

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
305 EAST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
PHONE: (919) 682-5511**



“Puzzled and Discouraged”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Third Sunday of Easter (Year A)

April 30, 2017

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 1: 17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Behold the newly dedicated Paschal candle. As Marilyn mentioned, it has been years, and it is finally here as a permanent statement at every baptism, funeral, and during the entire Easter season that Christ Jesus is the Light of the World. At Baptism, each and every one of us in the living waters of baptism has been enlightened with that light of Christ, and I hope during the course of this Easter season, as we see the candle lit, our lives will be enlightened despite the darkness around us and in us. Congratulations to Mindy, the Worship and the Arts committee, and anyone over the many years who have touched the development and the placement of this paschal candle.

On Easter Sunday, Mindy, our pastor, preached a sermon that frames for us the Easter season. She said the old world, that pre-Resurrection world, wants us to be afraid that hate will win, that war will consume the world, that violence will have the final say. So she challenges us and says, “We have to decide where we stand and what we will do in this new and frightening Resurrection world because we have a choice about which world we will live in: the old world of suffocating fear and death or the new world of abundant life and love.”

Her words came to my mind, not because I go back and reread everybody’s sermons every week, but because I received a newsletter from Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. He is a friend of our congregation; he works with me closely in my Duke work in Walltown. Jonathan has this to say in his newsletter from the School

of Conversion:

“If the Easter story shows us anything, it makes clear that Jesus’ closest disciples would have preferred to avoid facing the most basic conflict and choice between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. But the way of Jesus brought them to a crisis point through direct action. Resurrection happens. The impossible becomes possibility only after direct action clarifies the issue for his disciples.”

This Easter season, represented by the light of Christ and this candle, invites you, calls you, demands of you to choose the world of abundant love and direct action required of the kingdom of God, or else we step back in fear into the pre-Resurrection world and the political kingdoms of this world.

This brings us to the story of the disciples walking from Jerusalem, where Jesus’ destiny was supposed to be reached and climaxed, off to their home in Emmaus. I love this story because of all the Resurrection narratives, it invites us in and calls us to recognize our own spiritual journey as they walk along on the road with the very person that they deserted in Jerusalem. They did not know that as they walked along, lamenting, in sadness, distressed, dejected, discouraged, puzzled, depressed, devastated. And yet, Jesus walks near to them and without their recognizing him, Jesus asks, “What are you talking about? What things have happened?” They were surprised and told the story that this Jesus, a mighty prophet of God, was turned over, he was executed, and we had hoped he was to be the One to redeem Israel, to deliver Israel from the occupation of the Romans, to free Israel up. We had hoped that he was the One.

And then it went on to say, and I think this is one of the precious moments: “And moreover, you won’t believe these women went by the tomb, and it was empty! Can you believe this, they said angels told them that he was risen, that he wasn’t there, that he was alive! Can you believe that?”

And then Jesus enters into dialogue with them and says how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had declared. In a very succinct way, he sums up the mystery of how he understood himself as a messiah. He is part of the root of Jesse, he is part of the Davidic line—we’ve heard the genealogy stories—but he connects

the Messiah of David with the suffering servant of Isaiah. It is necessary, he says, that the Messiah should suffer and then enter into his glory. And then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself and all the scriptures.

Here is where their choice comes in. The two disciples had an opportunity, after hearing the commentary and explanation that Jesus rendered, to accept the teaching or reject it and continue on with their journey. Jesus was moving on, and they finally made the decision to ask him to stay with them, which is the beginning sign of their willingness to learn more and to rekindle their newly found faith in this Lord that they had abandoned. So Jesus did, had supper with them, broke the bread, and there the disciples discovered in the breaking of that bread and the cup shared that he was, in fact, their Lord. And they became witnesses, with all the rest in Jerusalem. They turned right around, went back to Jerusalem, that central place of the destiny of Jesus, and stood with the eleven and the rest in proclaiming by their lives, by their words, and by sacraments later in the early church that Christ is truly the Risen One.

My message to you is this: The narrative of the story of Emmaus is your story, too. We are all tempted in some way or another to wonder if the suffering borne in love by this Jesus crucified is a saving death—has it really changed anything at all? You heard in the sermon from Mindy about war, violence, hatred. You wonder rightly if anything has been changed at all. As we listen and learn and celebrate by Word and Sacrament, as we give direct service and action in the world in which we live and by the quality of our lives each and every day, we all know that the Easter mystery has changed everything.

Each and every one of us in our own way has come to see and recognize the Risen Lord. We each have our own particular story. This is highlighted today as we welcome new members into our community. They have their own story, they have their own pathway that led them to us. I'm excited for them and for us in the contribution they can make in the way in which we can build them up as they grow on the road to develop their own way of life. Ken, Mary Jo, and Doug, we welcome you, and we thank you for giving us new life, new energy, and new blood into our community.

You would not be here—we would not be here—if we have not in some way or other seen the Risen Christ, somehow, someday, somewhere or at some time, the Risen Christ has shown his face.

Mary Jo, Ken, and Doug didn't just show up. They were invited to be part of this community, and we welcomed them. I encourage you, as part of the direct action that you heard from Jonathan, that you take the time and effort to invite others to be part of our community, your friends, your neighbors, your relatives, anyone who shows an inkling of interest in the world in which you live to see the world as you see it as one's enlightened by the faith of Christ Jesus our Lord.

In conclusion, I ask you to choose. Choose the kingdom of God and its values. Choose the resurrection world. Choose it! Embrace it! Take direct action in so many different ways in bold witness as members of the Easter community.

Amen.

Influences: Mindy Douglas
Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
Robert Duggan
Patrick Ryan
Monica Hellwig

Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.

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