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“You are Witnesses to All of This”

A sermon by Sam Miglarese

3rd Sunday of Easter (Year B)

April 15, 2018

Acts 3: 12-19, Psalm 4, Luke 24: 35-48

On the front page of the Easter weekend edition of the WSJ, The Easter Effect was highlighted. How did a ragtag band of nobodies become such a dominant force and change the world? The Christian mission is inconceivable without Easter resurrection. After our celebrations of Easter Sunday, I viewed with great Joy and some nostalgia the live Jesus Christ Superstar John Legend concert that ended with Jesus being lifted up to the dawn of a new day. That the saving death of this Jesus was surely a source of hope for the world.

Yes we are witnesses to the Easter effect and despite the challenges we face every day - bearing our suffering with the human condition of our lives, overcoming broken relationships, dealing with addictions, dealing with grief for the loss of those we love - despite all of that we can share in love as did our Lord, “we share in the joy of people who had become convinced that they were witnesses to something extraordinary and inexplicable but nonetheless true. Something that gave a superabundance of meaning to life, and that erased fear of death. Something we had to share; something which to change the world.” Yes we are witnesses to Easter by our presence here each Sunday, and through the quality of our lives throughout the week. The whole Easter season is provided for us to explore precisely that truth.

Is not this the reason why Easter is not a one and done event, but a Jubilee season, a full 50 days to tease out the meaning and impact of this new way of life as we await the full power of His Spirit? If we are going to celebrate anything for an extended period of time, surely Easter it is.

- Fifty days to rejoice from Easter to Pentecost

- Fifty days to marvel at the mystery of the Risen Christ in our midst—note our resurrection stories
- Fifty days to reflect on the call of the risen Lord to send us out on mission as witnesses through the Holy Spirit.

That is why the Paschal candle shines brightly and why throughout this season we celebrate the Lord's Supper...it is not business as usual despite all the distractions to the contrary: graduations, weddings, spring breaks, etc. Our worship captures this truth and challenge.

You are witnesses to all of this. The Gospel of today linked to the Emmaus story has many similarities with last Sunday's Gospel. In both accounts the risen Christ appears to the disciples and stands "in their Midst." In both, his first words are "Peace be with you," and then he shows his hands, feet and side. In both, the disciples move from terror to joy and finally both end with a sending of the disciples in mission. You are witnesses to all of this.

But there are differences in emphasis. In the story of doubting Thomas there is a focus on believing, and in the Luke account we just heard there is an effort to convince them that the risen one is the same Jesus who was crucified and who still bears the marks of this on his body---he is real and alive! The Jesus of history is the same as the Christ of Faith! Point being that Jesus is not just a memory that lives on or a haunting ghost of the past—he is alive and real and touchable. If true we then must spread the word of that truth.

The focus of the second half of the Gospel is on the mission of the disciples as witnesses to the suffering Messiah who is raised—the key to being witness is an understanding of Scripture, and repentance and forgiveness of sins. We hear the same in the reading from Acts.

But to what are we witnesses today? None of us saw him die on the cross, or shared in the meal of broiled fish, feeling amazement and joy as we saw him alive in our midst. We have seen the Christian Witness of Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Archbishop Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but what about us?

Yet here is the challenge of our being a witness to all of this. If we do not have a personal experience resurrection story then there is nothing we have to witness.

So what is YOUR experience? The power of love that is greater than hate? The ability to rise above all of the darkness in the world? And in yourself? The ability to forgive and start over and over and over? The experience of being touched in healing ways? By whom? When and where? If it's all just abstract then we have nothing to witness. If it's personal then we have a story to tell.

We have experienced the risen Lord at the table of his word and we will soon be invited to know the Lord in the breaking of the bread. Let us savor the Lord where we are now—at the table of his word and at the table of his body.

Influences:

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