

Rev Sally's Sermon  
April 18, 2021

Alleluia Christ is risen – the Lord is risen indeed – Alleluia! But how do we know that Jesus is risen? Have you met him like the disciples did?

Can you imagine for a moment what it was like for Jesus' first disciples? Andrew, James, John, Phillip, Matthew, and the rest of Jesus' disciples gathered together on that Sunday evening. Strange things had been happening all day. Early in the morning some women had gone to Jesus' tomb and not only found it empty but reported that angels appeared and proclaimed that Jesus was risen from the dead. Later Simon Peter returned and reported that he had seen Jesus, risen from the dead. Then two other disciples reported that they also had met Jesus as they walked on the road to the town of Emmaus. Now, as they're talking about all this, Jesus stands among them. "Peace be with you." He says. As you can imagine the disciples are startled and confused. They're frightened, even terrified. Some think they're seeing a ghost. "Look at my hands and my feet." Jesus says, "It's really me. Touch me and see. Ghosts don't have flesh and bones." The disciples are caught up in the tension between hope and fear. They want to believe but logic makes them question. Then to offer one more proof, Jesus asks for food. He eats a piece of fish, to demonstrate that he really is alive. How would you have felt if you were in that room? Fearful? Or joyful? Frightened? Or amazed? Or all these at once?

As you hear this story, it may seem very familiar, like the one we heard last Sunday. Matthew, Luke, and John each give an account of Jesus' appearance to his disciples as they gathered together on the evening of that first Easter. Each writer tells the story from a slightly different point of view, like when different witnesses describe the same event to the police with slightly different details. But the point of their stories are all the same. Their aim is to proclaim the good news. Christ is Risen!

This is the good news of our faith. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are reconciled with God. God forgives our sins. The things that had separated us from God have been put aside. Now we are blessed with a living relationship with God. We are invited to live in a relationship with God as our Father. We are reminded of this gift in today's reading from the first letter of John. "See what love the father has given us, that we should be called children of God..." God has saved us from the sin that separated us

from him. God has blessed us with the fullness of life that comes from living in relationship with him. But Jesus reminds his disciples that this blessing is not to be kept to themselves. They are to be his witnesses. They are to proclaim to others what they themselves have seen.

Like the first disciples, we are also called to be Christ's witnesses. But before we can tell others, we have to know for ourselves. So how do we know that the Lord is truly risen? When the first disciples met the risen Lord, they touched his hands and feet. They heard his voice. They saw him eat the fish. They experienced his presence with their senses.

Though we don't have the benefit of our physical senses, we do still see the risen Lord. First, we know because of those disciples. They were the first witnesses. They went out and told others what they had seen and heard. Their witness is the foundation of what we read in the New Testament. Through their witness, we also see the risen Lord. But we also know that Jesus is risen through our own experience. We may not hear Jesus with our ears, but we do hear him through the words of scripture that speak to our deepest needs. We may not see Jesus with our eyes, but as we help others, we will see the risen Lord standing in front of us. We may not touch Jesus with our hands, but when I need healing and turn to the Lord in prayer, he enfolds me in his loving arms. I have found this to be true over the last year, as I've experienced struggles. At times I haven't known where my strength would come from, but then the Lord has provided.

But the good news of God's gift is not to be kept to ourselves. Jesus commissioned his disciples to be his witnesses. They were to tell others what they knew, what they had seen and heard. Jesus calls us also to be his witnesses. He calls us to share with others the ways we have seen him in our lives. Once we see the risen Lord, we are changed. We cannot remain silent. We are reminded of this call in our Baptismal covenant. We are asked, "Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?" This good news is proclaimed in many ways. We proclaim as we tell others our faith story. We proclaim as we help someone who needs food. We proclaim as we pray with someone who's hurting.

How will you proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection? Today, how will you be a witness to the risen Lord? When we find ways to share what we have seen and heard, then others will meet Jesus, then others will know the incredible truth – the Lord is risen indeed.