**April 15, 2018 – Second Sunday of Easter**

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Picture this scenario. You are watching “Dancing with the Stars” when a news alert comes on. “A panel from the National Science Foundation regrets to announce some bad news. The sun is expanding. The cosmologists thought this was going to happen many millennia in the future but it’s happening now. It will only be fifty or so years before the earth is too hot to sustain human life. Now back to regular programming.” What would be the reaction to such an announcement? Some people would be frantic, running around like headless chickens. Another group would form a committee to study the implications of this news and in time produce a 1476 page report. A third group would presume this was all a government conspiracy and why should we listen to those scientists anyway. But, I suspect, the vast majority of people would simply shrug their shoulders and pretty much continue on as they always have. After all, fifty years is a long way off.

Of course, while that scene is pure fantasy, the reality is that each one of us are on the clock. For some here, it might be more than fifty years before the clock winds down. For me and for one or two others of us, it’s significantly fewer than fifty years that we get to inhabit this earth. What do we usually do with this awareness? We file it way in the back of our heads and then do some shopping, cook supper or go to the movies. The Resurrection of Jesus is the slap in the face, the bucket on cold water, the shout to “wake up” to what is really happening. After Easter we simply can’t go on as we have before. We must view things as Easter people. To do that we have to experience Jesus as those first Christians did – as here among us. Have you noticed that whenever the Risen Jesus appears the Gospel reports something like this: suddenly “he stood in their midst.” The Risen Jesus is not waving at us from some distant shore of the bye and bye and saying, “Y’all come.” No, he is in our midst, saying “Here I am. Now is the time to live Easter life. Today is the day.” Easter is not so much about hope for the future as about the power of the present.

A story: Satan was having a business roundtable with all the devils, imps and demons. They were trying to figure out how to win the war against the Christians. After breaking up into small groups, and getting out the magic markers and flow charts, and having strategy sessions it was time to come up with a five year plan. Beelzebub suggested: why not tell them there’s no hell? No, that wouldn’t work. People know that if you do wrong you’re going to be punished. Mephistopheles proposed: why not tell them there’s no heaven? No, that wouldn’t work. People have too many foretastes of the joys of heaven in the love and happiness given them in life. Finally Lucifer said, I’ve got it. Tell them there’s no hurry. They’ve got plenty of time. All the devils agreed that would work. Once the tempters convinced people there’s no hurry, the battle was half won. Church, there is a hurry. The devil is busy now. The battle in enjoined today. The preaching of the church going back to St. Peter has always been in the present tense, “Repent and be converted that your sins may be wiped away.” “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Today we need to forgive. Today we need to learn generosity. Today we need to correct, rebuke, exhort. Today we need to love. We can’t put off putting on the Lord Jesus. Only when we fight in the present tense will the battle be won.

Since as Easter people, Jesus in in our midst in a present tense way, how are we supposed to act? St. Luke’s Gospel provides some hints. For example, “Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread.” What we do here on a Sunday, when we break the bread and share the cup is recognize that the risen Christ is with us in our present tense reality. This isn’t a pious memory of what Jesus did in the upper room so long ago. This is the current events, real presence of Christ in our midst. The story of the Risen Jesus is not about an empty tomb but a spirit-filled people. The Resurrection is about presence, not absence. Our gathering to break the bread and share the cup is where we come to recognize Jesus is here right now. As the body of Christ we live today a grace-filled existence in our table fellowship.

Then, St. Luke points out Easter people have to be willing to touch the wounds. Like the story of Doubting Thomas in St. John’s Gospel the Risen Lord invited those first disciples to touch in order to have a present tense faith. “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see.” We might not be able to touch Jesus of Nazareth walking down the dusty roads of Galilee but present tense faith requires that we touch the wounded body of Christ which is the Church. The wounds are all around us – people who are experiencing grief, those who are feeling lost and alone, those struggling with an illness, those who are overwhelmed by family problems. Besides those personal wounds there are also societal wounds: racism, injustice, immigration issues, violence. The list goes on and on. But Easter people are willing to touch those wounds, to show care to those who are hurting. Eternal life begins now when we are involved in the lives of others.

Another example from the gospel: Jesus asked, “Have you anything here to eat?” The Risen Lord was aware of basic human needs. For us as Easter people those human needs – hunger, homelessness, joblessness, inadequate health care, lack of heat – all have a claim on us. Working in the food pantry or working for better laws and other such things are not peripheral to our Easter faith but a concrete expression of it. Jesus stands in our midst personified in those individuals whose lives are a struggle. We foreshadow the heavenly banqueting table to making sure that we as people and as a church are reaching out to those in need.

Faith in the Risen Lord that we celebrate during these fifty days of Easter presses upon us the need to have a faith that is alive in the here and now. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad.