

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies.

This week we hear the Gospel of Luke's version of Jesus appearing to the disciples after the resurrection. They are startled and terrified, the Gospel tells us; and in a beautiful turn of phrase, the writer says that in their joy they were disbelieving, and still wondering. Everything had come crashing down around their ears at the crucifixion; and now that catastrophe seemed to be undone. Jesus was alive before them, not as a spirit, or an idea, or a memory, but as flesh and bone. The man they knew as their teacher and friend is now revealed to them as the Son of God who has come back from beyond death; what does that make the disciples?

The fear, disbelief, and wonder the disciples felt must have broken somewhat the intimacy they had previously with Jesus. This flesh and bone man, still with the wounds that he bore to his death, standing among them probably would have made them take a step back. So Jesus does something simple to reestablish that intimacy: he asks for something to eat, and those whom Jesus had fed in his earthly ministry now return that act of love and sustenance by feeding him.

Some of the mixed emotions the disciples were feeling may have been them questioning themselves; where did they fit in this amazing, miraculous turn of events? They were no longer merely learners following a rabbi, not just people loyal to the man who healed them. They were now caught up in something enormous and unimaginable, and clearly the work of an almighty God. Who were they now? What were they meant to do?

In our Bible class last week, we were talking about how Jesus appeared among the disciples and told them to carry on the work of building the kingdom that he had started. Unfortunately, it was this work that got Jesus killed; so Jesus is asking his disciples to run the same risks as he did, and to possibly face the same fate. That is asking a lot; when the disciples face death, they will face it as mortal humans; Jesus has been revealed as the beloved Son of God; the disciples had to wonder, who were they now, in light of the resurrection? If they took up the work that Jesus began, what might become of them?

“See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are... Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will

be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when Jesus is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”

The first letter of John gently and tenderly tells its readers that part of our call as disciples is to trust in a love we can never fully comprehend. We know so little of what it means to be an immortal soul in a mortal body; to be the divine spark in human flesh and bones. But we believe that God has breathed life into us that lasts beyond our physical death; and that God has redeemed, renewed, and rekindled with the fire of the Spirit that divine spark within us so that our souls do not fall into darkness, but are lifted into light.

Jesus calls his disciples to be witnesses to his life, death and resurrection throughout the world. And perhaps Jesus calls us to be witnesses not just to our belief, but to our joy amid disbelief; our doubt in the midst of wonder. I think it was the writer Anne Lamott who said the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Perhaps Jesus is calling us, his disciples, to witness to what we cannot always intellectually grasp, but what we are spiritually assured of: that we are beloved of God. Imagine the disciples taking on this new image of themselves. What would it mean if we no longer defined

ourselves as winners or losers? As entitled or undeserving? As respectable or irresponsible? What if, amid the disbelief and doubt we have about ourselves and each other, we could behold with joy and wonder who God intended each of us to be, and how God loves that possibility, that deep inner reality that God asks us to nurture and raise up? What if we practiced loving ourselves and each other with the same love that we have received: a love that in humility submitted to the shame of the cross in order to reveal God's vision of who we are?

As God's beloved, we have been given true life without end; we have also been called to the work of fulfilling the meaning and the intention of that life: to witness to ourselves and the world that God became incarnate for all, and reaches out to us with an extravagant love. And though we will not always fully understand or perfect it, to go out in witness that God has called us to love one another with the same love that God has shown us. Amid disbelief and doubt, in joy and wonder, may we do so. Amen.