

If you read the New Testament, especially the Gospels, we can find that the majority of the pages are devoted to the years before Easter and particularly the week before Easter.

Beginning with Palm Sunday and continuing through Jesus' death on Good Friday, a full quarter of Matthew's entire book is devoted to that one week. Similarly that week dominates nearly a third of Mark's gospel and nearly 40% of John's!

That means that week -- Holy Week -- is important; it tells us that the story of what happened during that one week is central to our faith.

But what about the following week? We know much about the Holy Week; but how much do we know about the week after his resurrection?

Today's John text takes us to that week: the week after Easter. I believe that the story from the book of Acts today is not many weeks after Easter.

Today is the first week after Easter. The passages for today meet us where we are and where we live literally and metaphorically.

Let's take a look at the Gospel story first. We are talking about the evening on the resurrection day. The first thing we hear from this text is that people were not very excited; they were not uplifted; instead, they were very much *in fear*; they were afraid.

What do you mean they were in fear? Didn't they just have Easter in the morning? Didn't they hear what happened at the tomb? Why did they have to be in fear?

The same thing: we just had Easter last week; the Easter lilies and banners are still here in this room; and where are we? Are we all happy, excited, joyous, and uplifted and not worried about anything at all? Where are you? Where am I? Where are we as people?

Did anything happen since last week? Did anyone hit the jackpot? Did anyone have a baby or get a new job or anything new and big? Looks like nothing happened.

Then, why should we get excited?

Well, before we go over today’s lesson, I would like us to revisit the verses before: 20:1-18, last week’s story.

And I noticed that this little portion of scripture has these repeated words: “do not know” 4 times.

v.2: “We do not know”

v.9: “they did not understand”

v.13: “I do not know”

v.14: “She did not know”

What is it that the writer of John’s Gospel is trying to do through this resurrection story? What does he want us to know? Why does he emphasize the fact that we/they/I/she “did not know” even at the tomb?

We are talking about Easter as a victory; we are talking about the people who went to the tomb as witnesses of God’s almighty power over death. Then why didn’t the author write: “They were all excited and happy and relieved!” Why?

And then in today’s lesson, it says that evening, everyone was there in that room with their doors locked up; they were in fear.

But it is not just John’s Gospel; other gospels also say the same thing.

Mark 16:11-14: The disciples in general didn't believe the initial reports of Jesus' resurrection.

Luke 24:13-31: The two who were on the road to Emmaus were obviously kind of slow in recognizing Jesus.

Matthew 28:17: And as Jesus was about to ascend, some of his disciples still doubted.

I think this is the point. All the Gospel writers knew their audiences. They knew where their people were. They knew exactly whom they were speaking to.

Even though the people in their communities heard the resurrection story many times, they had doubt; they weren't sure what that really meant for them in their daily living. Even though they heard the resurrection story many times, things did not seem to get better in terms of making their ends meet.

Life was still tough; challenges were still there.

The doubt is the reality. It was true 2000 years ago; it is also true now. People were in fear of many things 2000 years ago in John's community; people are in fear now in our community.

We are human beings. We are limited in what we know. If we knew everything about everything, we would not doubt anything!

Doubt is an expression of our limitedness. And sometimes, it serves or can serve to drive us on, to challenge us to grow, to understand in deeper ways.

Paul Tillich said, "Serious doubt is confirmation of faith. It indicates the seriousness of the concern."

There is an old story about Augustine. They say that he was struggling with the doctrine of the Trinity...with lots of doubts and questions about it. He took a walk on the beach one day and saw a little boy digging a hole in the sand with a shell, running down to the water

and filling up the shell, then rushing back to the hole and pouring the water in it.

"What are you doing, my little man?" Augustine asked. "I'm trying to put the ocean in this hole," the boy replied.

And suddenly Augustine realized that this was exactly what he had been trying to do. Many times we just do not understand the mystery of God and how God works in our midst.

Today, John's answer for his struggling and doubting congregation is quite simple. He is not giving them (and us) an answer in any complicated theological term.

He just says in verse 19, "Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." He says, Jesus was there; the resurrected Jesus was there showing his hands and side. He doesn't even explain how Jesus came into that room which was locked up.

Maybe he did not know it either; he simply says, the risen Christ was there and everyone rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

That was it. It is that simple. You meet the Lord when he comes to you. You meet him when he calls your name. You encounter him when he touches your heart. Thomas couldn't believe him until he would touch him literally; sure, Jesus understood and let him do what he wanted to do. But Jesus said, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

I don't know how to explain this. People have different experiences. Some people come to believe very easy; and some people don't.

But I can just tell you what happened to me.

(My experience on the 1st day at the church during high school in 1975: *my heart was strangely warmed upon entering the church for the very first time; I have never stopped going to church since then.*)

So I understand how the story of Acts today can be possible.

Peter and his friends were all afraid and in doubt; they not only locked the doors up; they also locked themselves up for fear of the people who killed Jesus until a few weeks ago.

But now see what they are doing in Acts! They are on fire preaching about Christ’s death and resurrection to the same group of Jewish leaders of whom they were afraid of. How would you explain this? How is this possible?

Before this, Peter and his friends were put in jail. But they found themselves standing in front of this crowd preaching again? And verse 19 says, the angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison. How can you explain this? No explanation. Simply speaking, it is what God did.

Before that, if you see the chapter 3, Peter and John pray for this man who was crippled from his birth and he was healed and walked around praising the Lord. How can you explain this? No explanation again. It is what God did.

Let me tell you what happened! And 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection, if you read Acts 2, you will know what happened: all the disciples sat in a room in Jerusalem and prayed together for the Holy Spirit to come down and anoint them; and the Spirit of God did come down upon them and everything changed. It is simply what God did 2000 years ago; I believe it is what He is still doing in our midst.

Where are you?

“Where Are You,” John 20:19-31; Acts 5:27-32; 2nd Easter; 4/11/2010; AUMC

No matter where you are, God can still do things that we cannot quite understand.

When the Spirit of God come and touch our doubting hearts, our lives can change forever. That’s what we see in the story in the Bible and that is what can still happen to all of us.