

If You Think *That's* Weird....

[Text - John20:19-31]

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Generally speaking, you and I don't have the experience of being visited by someone who has recently died. [Or if we *do*, we probably don't mention it to many people!] Even though we may dream or daydream about a departed loved one, and truly feel his or her presence, the possibility of that person breathing on us, or of us reaching-out and touching that person's hands, is highly unlikely. Likewise, the circumstances of this morning's New Testament reading also seem highly unlikely, and pretty bizarre! They just don't conform to the way things are, in our normal Life experiences. But then again, when we think about the life of Jesus Christ, we realize that there are many things about him that don't fit the normal pattern of Life.

I'm not talking about the stories of his birth, or the many signs and miracles attributed to him. I'm talking about Jesus' extraordinary capacity to love the unlovable; his uncanny ability to warmly welcome social and religious outcasts; his phenomenal power to uplift and comfort the poor and the afflicted; his deep desire to forgive those who misunderstand or mistreat him; and his divine way of enhancing every aspect of Life that he touches. So while the circumstances of this morning's reading may seem weird or other-worldly, its content does have an authentic and familiar feel. Even though this, and the other appearances of the Risen Christ, challenge what our scientific minds consider to be "normal", what they communicate is actually quite reasonable, when looked at in the light of Jesus' entire Life Mission. The purpose of Jesus passing through locked doors, isn't to prove his paranormal powers. It's to encourage his hurting and devastated disciples; to raise them up; and to send them boldly back among the Living - just like Jesus Christ!

When we think about the dreadful condition of those disciples on that first Easter evening - discouraged and frightened - hiding behind locked doors - just waiting for the chance to quietly sneak-out of town -

we realize that something extremely drastic had to happen in order for that to change. And somehow, they *do* experience a complete turn-around, which can truly be described as “miraculous!” Exactly what they experienced, may defy what we would consider “normal”. Nonetheless, it is completely compatible with what they and others have previously experienced in their encounters with Jesus Christ. Throughout his life, Jesus seeks-out and embraces, affirms and raises-up people who are struggling and suffering, hurting, or hiding - regardless of who they are or how they might choose to isolate themselves. And this encounter on that first Easter evening is no different.

In spite of those tightly locked doors, Jesus Christ comes to his friends, stands among them and says, “Peace be with you!” He doesn’t say, “You all ran away and let me down, just like I thought you might!” He doesn’t tell them, “I am really disappointed with you!” He simply says to them, “Shalom aleikhem.” - Peace and Wholeness be with you!” Then, to further repair and bolster their shattered confidence, Jesus says to them, “As the Holy One has sent me, so I now send you!” And as he breathes upon them the power of Holy Spirit, Jesus lets them know that they now have within themselves the power to *forgive* themselves, as well as the capacity to forgive - and to *love* - anyone who misunderstands or mistreats them. And as we know, not only from the Biblical accounts, but also by the historic results, this tiny, ragtag group of ordinary people is able to rise above their fears and doubts, and to transform the entire world in extraordinary ways!

Unfortunately, one of their group, Thomas, misses out on this profound experience. [See, you never want to skip a Sunday gathering!] Nevertheless, Jesus still finds a way to encounter this one, skeptical individual, so that his life and hope may also be renewed and restored. And if Jesus doesn’t penalize Thomas for doubting the Resurrection, he certainly won’t penalize you and me when we have our doubts. The Good News of Easter, is that our lives are not renewed or restored by our religious beliefs; they are regenerated and redeemed by our *faith* - by our trusting in the unfailing power of Divine

Love and Grace. Because when you and I truly *trust* that the Source of our lives - and all that exists - is good and gracious and compassionate, then we ourselves are inspired and empowered to live in ways that are good and gracious and compassionate.

For you and me today, the Christian Faith cannot merely consist of our believing in something strange that happened “way-back-when.” Our Faith needs to inspire and empower us to trust in the *continuing* action of the Holy One in the here-and-now. Personally, I have never had a vision of the Risen Christ, yet I truly trust that Jesus Christ is alive and active in this world today. That trust comes, in part, because of the dramatic change in the lives of those first followers. Yet my trust also comes from seeing the awesome impact of the Living Christ in the lives of people today - many of them sitting right here this morning!

This morning and throughout this Easter Season, you and I are encouraged to discover the underlying Truth within each of those early Resurrection accounts: That the Eternal Source of Divine Love - revealed through Jesus Christ - remains constant and unstoppable. And if that Holy Love will not rest until all people and all of Creation are restored and redeemed, then neither should you or I.

You and I may not have the ability to walk through solid walls or tightly locked doors; but we certainly have the capacity to throw those doors wide-open; to knock-down those walls; and to break-down those social and religious barriers that prevent others from seeing and experiencing the Living, Loving Christ - within us and among us. Just like Jesus, you and I have the capacity to love the unlovable; to warmly welcome the outcast; to uplift and comfort the poor and the afflicted; to forgive those who do us wrong; and to live divinely abundant lives. And while this may not be the “normal” way of doing things, I say “Thanks be to God - The One who calls us to live in a somewhat *weird*, yet absolutely *wonderful* way!” A way that brings *Shalom* - peace and wholeness - to us, and to all those whose lives we touch.