

**The Third Sunday of Easter**  
**The Rev. Christy Dorn**

4-22-07

*Acts 9:1-6 [7-20]*

*Psalm 30: 2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13*

*Revelation 5:11-14*

*John 21:1-19*

**Touched by Faith - John 21: 1-19**

Today's Collect reads, "O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work.

Today's Gospel scene, like the resurrection itself, calls for faith. This scene occurs sometime after that first Easter; the disciples had left Jerusalem and gone back home to Galilee. They had a bad case of the post-resurrection blues. But they had to resume the lives they had lived before Jesus came into their lives. So, they went back to their former occupations—to the only work they knew how to do: fishing. They were out all night long, but they hadn't caught anything. It was a long night—day was breaking. They must have been discouraged. Then they heard someone call out and suggest they cast their net in another direction. They did that and they caught so many fish, they were unable to haul them all in. It was then that they recognized him. John said to Peter, "It is the Lord." Just when they thought things couldn't get any worse, he came back once more. And suddenly the world changed and the fish were abundant. They recognized him. But how did they know?

I'm sure each one of us has recognized the Risen Lord. Each one of us has our own story. And as different as those stories may be, one fact is common to us all: We wouldn't be here if the Risen Lord hadn't somehow, somewhere, sometime, shown his face to us. That's why we can recognize him when his Word is proclaimed.

Yet, throughout our world today, there is a sense that God is asleep on the job. We tend to have an empirical faith—like Thomas, if we can't see it, we don't believe it. Here we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—how can one really believe in God? Or maybe the real question is how do we touch God? And how does God touch us? There is a genuine sense in which Christ is not here. He *is not* here as he was in Palestine: We can't touch him as Peter or Thomas did, that is true. But there are also many Christians who do not experience Christ in the people they see or the things they hear. That's understandable when you consider a centuries old Semitic text that's taken out of context and flung into 21<sup>st</sup> c. Huntington Beach. The disciples knew what it meant to be alive in Christ that day by the Sea of Tiberias. Our Gospel says, "They knew it was the Lord." Can we say the same thing? Can we say of him, "There he is!"

Maybe God is not asleep at all. Maybe it's us. Maybe God is fully awake and waiting....waiting for individuals to be his children....waiting for communities to be his people....waiting for churches to be his Church....waiting for countries to join together to be his world. God isn't asleep; God is at work even when our hearts cry out, "Where are you?" And I'm sure that in light of the senseless and unspeakable tragedy in Virginia one week ago—a tragedy in which

innocent lives were lost and families were torn apart—people were crying out, “God, where are you?!”

Like most of you, I’m sure, I was overwhelmed by the news of last Monday’s massacre in Virginia—just as I am overwhelmed each time I hear the daily death count from Iraq. It’s understandable that people question God and their faith and ask, “How could something like this happen?” We’ve all dealt with circumstances in life when we ask that question. We don’t have answers for everything. One thing that has become increasingly apparent in this tragedy is that the killer was a deeply disturbed individual who became violent. May God be with the families of the innocent victims and with the family of the young man who held the gun.

It’s during such times as these that reasoning and explaining become irrelevant; that TV images become mind numbing; that the ongoing count of numbers of the injured and numbers of the dead become lessons only in how to count. We are reduced to silence; we are reduced to prayer. And it’s in times like these that we need our faith more than ever. It’s been said that ‘only in a world where faith is difficult, can faith exist’. We who are here today are here because we seek God. In that seeking, relationships are formed: our relationship with God and relationships with our fellow believers. Those relationships make a difference in our lives. There is evil in our world. This we know for sure. There is also much that is good. Even though we human beings have the capacity to mess up a lot of things, we also have the capacity to fix many of the things we have messed up. It’s a power that comes from God.

Coming back to today’s Gospel--the disciples had a bad case of the post-resurrection blues. But then Jesus came back and they had a party. They forgot all about the blues as they feasted and celebrated. But what would they do the next day? Would they go back to singing the blues once the party was over? Or, were they changed? Were some of the things he had taught them beginning to sink in? He had told them, “You are in the world, but not *of* the world.” Maybe now they were beginning to understand—the world was the same—*they* were the ones who were different. They now knew they had a superabundance of spiritual nourishment available to them. But the world would stay the same unless they shared that abundance. The disciples’ encounter with the Risen Lord called them *back* to their ministry of preaching, teaching, healing, and forgiving.

I’m reminded of a story about a little girl named Susie. Susie was born with Downs’ Syndrome. Sometimes the other kids made fun of her because she was different. When she was five, she and the other children in her Sunday School class were each given a plastic Easter egg. They were asked to find a symbol of Easter and put that image inside the egg and to bring the egg back to class the next week. So, when the next Sunday came, all the children had their eggs. One child put a flower inside her egg, another had a picture of a butterfly, another put a rock in—when the egg was opened, the rock rolled away. When Susie’s turn came, she opened her egg and it was empty. The children teased her and said, “Susie, you got the assignment wrong.” She looked at them and said, “No, I got it right. The tomb was empty.”

Well, two years later, Susie died—complications from her Downs’ Syndrome. At her funeral, those same children brought empty Easter eggs and placed them on her coffin. That experience changed those children: they were touched by God in a new way.

We, too, have been changed. Let's not return to our former occupations, forgetting our call to be followers of Jesus. We who are alive in Christ—we who have witnessed his presence among us—are called to re-create our world through our commitment to Gospel values. At this Eucharist, let us pray that the Lord will send us forth—touched by God, believing in the power of the Risen Lord to make all things new.