

Trinity Church
April 26, 2009

The Third Sunday of Easter
RCL, Year B, Easter 3

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (1 John 3:1)

"We are God's children now!" That is the whole substance of what is revealed to us today as we step another Sunday deeper into the mystery of Christ's resurrection. We are God's children, and that is right now, not in some unrealized future, but right now.

So let me back up and walk into this aspect of Jesus' resurrection one step at a time.

Our first encounter with Jesus' resurrection is at the tomb, and the second with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, when he is known to them in the breaking of the bread. In both of these encounters, the women at the tomb and the disciples on the road are lifted out of their earthly death and into the Divine reality of God's eternal love in which Jesus abides in resurrection and life. The women look into the tomb where death resides, but what they experience is Jesus alive in God's glory.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus sit at table to eat a meal like Jesus ate with his disciples before his passion, but what they experience is the Divine Banquet of eternal life with God, just as Jesus said, "I will not eat this bread or drink this cup again, until I eat it with you in the Kingdom of God." When Jesus broke the bread, they recognized him in the Divine Banquet. They were drawn out of the earthly reality of Jesus' passion and into the Divine Reality of resurrection and life.

By drawing the holy women and the disciples into the reality of God's love in the Risen Christ, they experienced themselves as Children of God now. They experienced themselves like him. We know that we shall be like him because we have seen ourselves in the Risen Christ. We have experienced this way of resurrection ourselves. As the collect for today says, "Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him" in the breaking of the bread. We are God's children because we live in that reality now.

Today, the mystery of resurrection bids us look at resurrection another way. In the reverse, if you will. Jesus appears to his disciples saying, "Peace be with you." The disciples think that he is a spirit, that he is entirely in that Divine Reality of resurrection I just talked about. But Jesus says, "Don't let fear and doubt blind you. Look, my wounds are in real flesh. Look, I am eating real broiled fish. My resurrection and life are with you in the flesh and blood of our lives in the world. You are children of God now. You can show resurrection and life to the world throughout your life in the world now. You are like me, because you have seen me as I am." We are the body of the resurrected Christ in the world now.

This gets lived out in today's readings in two ways. The first has to do with Scripture. The Tuesday Bible Class went to the Walters on Friday to see pages from the St. John's Bible, a work still in progress in which the whole Bible is being written in stunning calligraphy by hand and illuminated by insightful artists who lift the words off the page and into our hearts. It's an immense feat involving many people, years of time, and billions of dollars. We were amazed at how "of the earth" scripture is: 120 cowhides to make the parchment, ink from China, dyes from

berries and minerals, suspended in egg yolk, bordered by bands of gold leaf, and crafted by the hand of man in script on a page. Scripture may be holy, but Scripture is entirely of the earth. Scripture resides in this world, awaiting inspiration.

Jesus says, "Everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. The resurrected Jesus inspires our understanding of all Scripture. The resurrected Jesus is the inspiration of Scripture. The resurrected Jesus is himself the Word, the author of life, as Peter says in Acts. "You are witnesses of these things," Jesus tells us. It is our experience of Jesus' resurrection and life, his spirit in us, that illuminates all of Scripture with Christ's glory. In Christ, all of Scripture is fulfilled – brought to its complete inspiration. You are the children of God now in this world who unlock for every people, language and nation the unsearchable riches of God's glory revealed through Christ in Holy Scripture. You are the only ones, God's children now, who can do that. What a witness!

The second has to do with the transformation of life in this world. Peter points to this in Acts when he says to the crowd who are amazed that a lame man was made to walk, "Why do you wonder at this? It is not our power that made him walk, but the Risen Christ that has made this man strong. This can happen to you as well," Peter says. "Turn to God" and be made new.

This past Christmas, Matthew Parris wrote a column in The Times of London. "I am an atheist," he writes, "but I truly believe Africa needs God. Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's problems, because faith brings real transformation of life." Matthew grew up in Malawi, and he returned there to look at a project to install pumps for water in villages, a project sponsored by his newspaper. The pumps gave practical help, but faith in the Risen Christ is what transformed the villages. Faith liberated the people, enlivened them to transform their lives, gave them hope, encouraged them to engage the world. It's not about pumps alone; it's about pumps and the Easter faith. Missionary witness transforming lives. The Risen Christ embodied in real people now.

Beloved, you are God's children now. You are like him. You have seen the Risen One as he is.