

Preached by Carl Rush
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Alexandria, VA 22310
April 26, 2009

1 John 3:1–7
Luke 24:36b–48

WHEN SEEING ISN'T BELIEVING

These disciples are startled and frightened. In the midst of a wonderful event, the good news about their resurrected Messiah has them deep-down scared. Have you ever watched the reaction from people who have their homes made over on TV specials? The bus comes and suddenly the people drop to their knees. There's conflicting emotions—their minds and their hearts race. There's disbelief. And there's unbridled joy. Home makeovers are examples of how people react when they see it but can't believe it. Some recent quotes include, "Our lives have been changed forever." "It's what we've always hoped for."

But wait. I think I heard some of those same words yesterday. When it seemed like forty people from our congregation made their way to a local home in need of repair. And not only our church—another church joined us; we descended upon that home and it looked like extreme make-over. Six truck loads of debris were removed, several coats of paint applied, new shingles, fresh siding, screen and storm doors installed; and before long, you can really make a difference.

Jesus personifies the unpredictable and unbridled nature of what the church has always been called to be. Celebration is at our core as disciples and as a people when we are doing what we know Christ encourages. But just like the eleven disciples and their companion, there are times in our church experience when we might become conflicted. Times when we need to hear again questions that will open our hearts.

Why are you frightened? Why do you have doubts arise in your hearts? Or more literally, why do you entertain that internal debate with yourself. Jesus asks questions and we are expected to reopen our lives to the resurrection. But even the Messiah—even Christ—had to do more to overcome the internal debate going on within each of the disciples and their companion. Jesus encouraged them to step out in faith—to step beyond what they thought they could believe—and to look at his hands and his feet.

"See, it is I. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." What does scripture teach us? And still the disciples wondered about all that was happening around them. They are convinced they are seeing a ghost. They are unconvinced that Jesus is who he says he is, even after he has presented his own body as proof. Now these ancient Presbyterians—I mean these ancient skeptics—they need additional evidence. So Jesus does two things. He asks if they have anything to eat. A piece of broiled fish is brought to him and he eats it in their presence. You see, the gospel must be lived before it can be taught. The gospel must be embodied before it can be learned.

I know this is a lot to take in. So I am going to leave you with a little hook from which you can forever hang this story of the resurrection of Christ. It came to me today in a little story.

This is a story from a couple who decided to go to Florida to escape an icy Minneapolis winter. They decided to stay at the same hotel where they had spent their honeymoon thirty years earlier. Their schedules were similar to ours. Hectic. Jam-packed. In fact, the husband had to make his journey to Florida by leaving a business meeting and flying in on Thursday night. His wife would have to follow from Minneapolis on Friday.

The husband checked in, sat down and opened his computer. He decided to send his wife an e-mail, but even though he knew her address by heart, he accidentally mistyped her e-mail address, and the message was sent to an erroneous email. Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, a minister's widow was just returning from her husband's funeral. The distraught widow decided to check her e-mail, expecting comforting messages from relatives and friends. She opened the first message, shrieked in horror, and fainted.

Her son came in, giving her aid, and looked at the computer screen which read, "To my loving wife: Subject: I've arrived. Date: October 16, 2008. I know you are surprised to hear from me. They have WiFi here now. And you can send messages to friends and loved ones. I just arrived and have checked in. I made sure everything was prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then. Hope your journey was as uneventful as mine was. P.S. It sure is hot down here."

The point of the story—indeed the point that we need to take away from the resurrection—is that when Jesus appears to his followers, He is turning their bad news into good news—their bad experiences into a resurrection experience. Jesus is living proof that even his suffering in pain can be transformed into joy, as can ours. Jesus is our inspiration. Jesus is our motivation for sharing the complete fulfillment of all of scripture. Jesus still makes us witnesses today—witnesses to the repentance and the forgiveness that this world longs to know.

What would it take for us to become so caught up in the familiar hospitality rituals that we forgot our fears and began to live into believing—believing how completely our lives have been changed, how Christ has already remade life into exactly what we had always hoped for? We are Easter people. We are the people who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And of our inheritance because we know him and he knows us. Amen.

I would like you now to take internal stock of yourself. What did you bring into this sanctuary? What internal debate was going on for you? What doubt or fear? What pain? What suffering did you carefully keep hidden for anyone to see which you now need to reveal to Christ? Worship God with exactly where you are. Worship God now in spirit, and in truth.