

Yr. B, Easter 3
April 15, 2018
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1225 Words

Lessons: Acts 3:12-19
Psalm 4
1 John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36b-48

“Many are saying, ‘Oh, that we might see better times!’” This timeless longing was expressed clearly by the psalmist 3000 years ago. “Oh, that we might see better times!” It is just as true today.

One of the common things a pastor hears—in one way or another—is *that very prayer*. Sometimes it is spoken with hope. Sometimes it is conveyed with desperation. The people who say these words...and pray this prayer are simply recognizing that all is not right with the world...or with their families...or their friends...or their jobs...or their school work...or with their health.

We live in a culture that hypes the idea of a perfect life, available for a price—perhaps it is a price you cannot afford. Everywhere we turn, someone is selling something that will deliver to us lives that are happier, more successful, and more convenient. Everywhere we turn, someone is selling us a product that will make us more beautiful, more sophisticated, and more marketable. It’s no wonder we repeat those 3000 year old words so effortlessly: “Oh, that we might see better times.”

Come back with me to that room where the friends of Jesus were locked in fear. According to Luke’s Gospel, the very first word Jesus speaks to his disciples is ‘peace.’ Let me translate what I think Jesus was saying. Jesus was not uttering a formal, liturgical statement, “The peace of the Lord be always with you.” (although this is what *our liturgy* is based upon.) But, Jesus was simply saying, “Peace, guys...Calm down...(or as my daughter likes to say) Chill.”

Even though Jesus had predicted all of this—the suffering, the death, being raised on the third day. Luke tells us that Jesus’ closest friends and followers were *still* startled. They were *still* afraid. They *still* doubted. If our faith is so comfortable that we are *always* content with Jesus, then we are not following him as closely as his closest friends did. We are no better than they were. We are no more faithful than they were. They feared. They doubted. *And so do we...*if we are paying careful attention.

Like the disciples and like the psalmist, we face times of fear and doubt, feeling alone. And *we pray*, “Oh, that we might see better times.”

Faith comes first by hearing, dear people, so hear these words of Jesus—“Peace be with you. Calm down. Chill...(because he is also here...risen indeed.)

I try to re-present Jesus, just like you do. Whenever our stomachs are churning and we feel anxious and don’t know what to say in a difficult situation, we can do *a lot worse* than simply speaking these faithful words of Jesus: “Peace. Calm. This is my prayer for you.”

And then, just let the silent love of God swirl those words around in the air...and our prayers will be answered. There will be peace.

The second thing Jesus invites his friends to do is look. “Look at my hands and my feet.” Notice that Jesus did not reveal himself with a halo, but rather with scars. Notice how Jesus did not prove himself with glory, but with deep wounds. Jesus did not show himself impervious to pain, but rather damaged and broken. So, faith comes, secondly, by seeing. Just this morning we prayed, “Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold Christ in all his redeeming work...”

I try to re-present Jesus just like you do. Whenever our stomachs are churning and we feel anxious in this role, we can do a lot worse than simply standing up for others who are weak and afraid, and standing *with* people who have doubts. And showing them that we are not impervious to these pains either.

The evidence of Christ's presence among us will be visible—not in spite of scars, but *because of them*. Nothing says, “Christ is here and Christ is risen” quite as profoundly as the wounds we share for the sake of love. Just let the silent love of God bind up those wounds...and our prayers will be answered.

By now, Luke reports, the disciples were no longer terrified. In fact, they were joyful...but still disbelieving and still wondering. Let's face it. It takes a lot for us to believe and trust something or *someone* new. As it should.

So, finally, Jesus presents the *pièce de résistance*! He asks his disbelieving friends a question: “Y'all got anything to eat?” He didn't ask a theological question. He didn't make a religious pronouncement. He just asked the basic—and funny—question: “What've y'all got to eat around here?”

Jesus (and Luke) expect us to laugh at this. Laughing helps us notice—and *remember*—what is real...and who is real. One thing you should notice and remember is that leftover fish is yucky. It is only for loves' sake, I believe, that Jesus ate that cold, nasty fish. He didn't eat because *he* was hungry; he ate because his friends were hungry...to believe. Give thanks that our Lord has a sense of humor about him, and a willingness to be real and basic...plainspoken and funny...for loves' sake.

I don't know if you noticed this, but the line in the psalm that follows the prayer that we might see better times, goes like this: “Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord.” What great news, that the countenance—the facial expression—of our Lord includes a smile and a laugh.

Make no mistake, to those who lord it over the weak, who deny justice to the oppressed, who take advantage of the poor, and who neglect the stranger in need; the countenance of our Lord is severe, stern, and tough as nails. Read any of the Gospels and see. But to everyone else, the countenance of our Lord is peaceful and gentle, merciful and mild, and—yes—even light-hearted and humorous.

I try to re-present Jesus just like you do. We can do a lot worse than simply not taking ourselves too seriously. The evidence of Christ's presence among us will be visible with joy and laughter, just as it is visible in the wounds and tears we share with those who are broken-hearted.

Nothing says, “Christ is here and Christ is risen” like being with people where they are—rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep—for the sake of love. Just let the silent love of God lift up our hearts as they truly are. And our prayers will be answered.

Dear people, it is Easter, and we have been given a job to do. Along with the first friends and followers of Jesus, we are called to be witnesses of these things: words of peace...wounds of love...and gladness of heart.

So when your prayer...or the prayers of those you love...begin with the words, “Oh, that we might see better times.” Your job, as a witness of Christ, is to be seen...and heard...and experienced as a representative witness who lifts up the light of our Lord's countenance—*his expression*—for others to see...and hear...and experience.

Through you, they will hear the peace that comes from above. Through you, they will see the wounds that come from love. Through you, they may even smile at the gladness of heart that comes from the joy of following Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.