

Easter 3

I want you to reach in your bulletin and take out that piece of paper that looks like a weird Rorschach blotter. Make sure the two legs are at the bottom. Now look for the black dots in the center. Now I want you to look at those dots intently until I tell you to stop. (about 30 seconds)

Now close your eyes and tilt your head back.

Congratulations, brothers and sisters, now you too have seen the risen Lord!

I pull out this visual trick every once in a while because, despite the fact that Jesus said “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe,” we can’t help but look with some envy at those who, following the resurrection, actually got to see Jesus risen from the dead, spent time in his presence, and received his instructions on how to change the world.

Take this morning’s gospel lesson for example. Isn’t it interesting that at least some of the disciples had simply returned to their previous lives; fishing?!

Then there was this “stranger” on the beach who told them where the fish were. Then first John, and then Peter realized that it was not a stranger on the beach; it was Jesus, once again appearing to them.

Bear in mind that Peter had denied Jesus 3 times on the morning of the crucifixion, and that is why Jesus probed the depth of Peter’s love. Peter is restored, the others were just as amazed as the first time they as fisherman encountered Jesus. And with no small amount of irony, Jesus concluded this exchange with the same words he used 3 years earlier: Follow me.

In other words, we’re starting again but now at a deeper level.

Don’t you wish you could’ve been there to see the risen Christ and watch all these remarkable events take place before your very eyes? Don’t you wonder why such remarkable things happened way back when but don’t seem to happen now? Don’t the spiritual experiences of those in the Bible seem so much more dramatic and powerful than our own experiences?

That is what I want you to think about a little this morning: which are the better experiences; theirs or ours? With that in mind I'd like to tell you another story from the life of Jesus.

One day Jesus and his disciples came upon a man who had been blind from birth. The disciples asked Jesus who had sinned that this man was blind; was it him or his parents? Jesus said neither, but that God's glory might be revealed, and he healed the man. Then a huge conflict broke out regarding the man, his identity and the fact that Jesus had violated the Sabbath laws by healing the man on the holy day of rest.

As the story progresses the former blind man goes from group to group, responding to their interrogations by saying: "All I know is that I was blind and now I can see". So in this story we have the disciples who tried to turn it into a chicken and egg argument. Then you have the rationalists who said that if this man can see then he must not be the man who had been blind. Then you have the Pharisees who were only concerned with strictly enforcing the Sabbath laws.

Now this story is an extreme example of what went on throughout Jesus' ministry. The truth I am getting at here is important for those who tend to romanticize the past. Most people who "saw" Jesus didn't really "see" him at all. Many people who never "saw" Jesus in his earthly life, do truly "see" him if they understand that he is God's Son who was sent to teach and redeem us and to demonstrate that life is eternal.

What I am saying is that the best spiritual experience in the world is the one you actually have. The best experience of God in all of history is the one which leads you to faith. It can be a mystical experience. It can be a rational conclusion. It can be a sense that God has sustained you through a crisis. It is important to seek and nurture our own relationship with God through Christ, and there is no better experience than that. Amen