

Easter 03 A 2017  
April 30, 2017 :: Luke 24:13-35  
Fr. Jim Cook

## “*Stories for Life.*”

Today is the third Sunday of Easter,  
the third Sunday  
when we celebrate  
the resurrection of Jesus  
from the grave.

What’s ironic  
is the fact that the rest of society  
has already moved on.  
On the Monday after Easter  
I went to Walmart  
and saw one shopping cart after another  
filled with leftover Easter paraphernalia  
marked down for quick sale.

But we in the church,  
we’ll spend seven Sundays in total,  
nearly fifty days  
celebrating Easter;  
remembering and retelling  
some of the great stories of Easter.

If that seems like overkill, it’s not,  
because it’s important  
that we hear *certain* stories  
again and again and again.

In fact, we humans  
are a storytelling lot.  
Before we could read or write  
we used stories  
to preserve and pass on  
our accumulated wisdom.

So you see,  
there is power in storytelling.  
For the stories we've been told,  
and the stories we tell others,  
help to shape our understanding of the world,  
and our place in it.

In other words,  
our stories form us,  
and shape how we see ourselves,  
and how we view the world.

Several years ago  
a social worker who deals with kids in foster care  
told this story.

One of her cases involved three little brothers —  
aged nine, seven, and five —  
who'd been taken from their parents  
when they were still very young.  
They were bounced from one foster home to another,  
and the only stories they had of their lives  
always involved  
fear and abuse,  
abandonment and failure.  
Eventually

they were placed with a young couple,  
and things were going really well.

One day, the social worker came to visit,  
because it looked like this placement  
might become permanent;  
the foster parents wanted to adopt the boys.

And at the end of the visit,  
when it was all confirmed,  
she sat down with the boys,  
and said to them:  
“You will not be split up.  
You are going to stay here.  
We will find schools for you all.  
We are going to start the adoption process.”

But the boys just stared at her in silence.  
So she asked them,  
“What did you just hear me say?”  
And they said,  
“We will be split up.  
We have to leave here.  
There are no schools for us.  
No one will ever adopt us.”

So she tried again, and again,  
but their stories —  
the stories that were being told and retold  
in their young minds —  
blocked them  
from hearing her story.

Eventually they all understood,  
but they found it hard to take in.

The way the social worker described it,  
those boys had gone for so long  
without hearing *any* good news,  
that their brains had never developed  
the neural pathways  
to enable them to *hear* good news,  
let alone process it.

Like a muscle that never is used,  
neural pathways for good news  
appear to be undeveloped  
if we're not accustomed  
to hearing good news.

It is as though we *cannot* hear good news  
as good news *at all*.

Hearing good news,  
hearing good news stories,  
time and time again  
effectively programs our brains  
to be alert for good news.

And having heard it, to process it.  
And having processed it, to internalize it.  
And then, having internalized it  
to allow it to *change* us.

I think something similar  
has been going on  
in our gospel readings  
this morning,  
last Sunday,  
and even on Easter Sunday.

That is,  
Jesus rises from the grave  
and appears to his closest  
friends and followers  
who are —  
at least initially —  
completely unable to recognize him.

Mary doesn't recognize him  
until he says her name.

The disciples don't recognize him  
until he shows them his wounds.

Thomas doesn't recognize him  
until he touches the wounds.

And the two disciples in today's gospel  
don't recognize Jesus  
until he breaks bread with them.

In other words,  
they cannot *see* Jesus,  
until they *hear*  
a new story.

When I reflect on all of this  
I begin to wonder,  
“How many times has the risen Jesus  
been standing right in front of me,  
or sitting right next to me,  
and I’ve been completely unaware?”

Which is to say,  
How often do the stories  
that I tell about myself —  
stories that could have started years ago  
with someone’s careless word,  
or someone’s thoughtless act;  
stories that I try to forget,  
or downplay,  
and yet they’ve still managed  
to form me,  
and *inform* me  
about who I am,  
and what my place in this world  
ultimately means —  
how often have I allowed those stories  
to blind me,  
to the presence of God in my life,  
and to deafen me,  
to *the* story  
that *God* tells about me.

I think, probably,  
it’s been far too often.  
And I think, that it’s probably  
the same way with many of you.

And that's why we need to hear  
these wonderful Easter stories  
time and time and time again.

Because, bottom line and all that,  
they're stories that remind us,  
and assure us,  
of the great love that God has for us.

And so,  
we need to hear these stories  
so that they can create  
within us  
new neural pathways  
to enable us to finally  
*see* God at work in our lives  
and in the world,  
and to *hear* the words  
that God wants to say to us,  
and to others through us,  
and to *feel* the presence of God,  
and the love of God,  
and the hope that comes from  
knowing that God tells lots of stories  
about each of us,  
and that all of those stories  
are good.

It's these stories  
that have the power to shape us,  
and form us,  
into the people God intended  
for us to be.

To *be* people created  
in the image and likeness of God.

To be people who are  
creative and generous,  
welcoming and loving,  
and accepting,  
and especially  
to be people  
who are hopeful.

That's why we need to spend lots of time  
in the Season of Easter,  
and hear all the great stories.  
But especially  
to be reminded  
of this particular story:

“For God so loved the world  
that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him  
may *not* perish  
but *may* have eternal life.

“Indeed,  
God did not send the Son into the world  
to condemn the world,  
but in order that  
the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).

And that, my friends,  
is the greatest story  
ever told. Amen.