

“God Gets the Last Word.”

Even though 14 days have passed for *us* since we celebrated Easter Sunday, our gospel reading nevertheless takes us back to the evening of that day, when Jesus was the talk of the town!

Because everyone has been wondering what’s been going on. They’re trying to figure out what to make of the disaster that was Good Friday. And they’re trying to figure out what to think about the mystery that was Easter Sunday and the empty tomb. And there are even rumors going about that Jesus is alive.

And so, while the followers of Jesus have been struggling against the chaos and confusion — and, while they’re trying to manage their own feelings of fear and guilt, of grief and doubt — in the midst of all that, Jesus suddenly appears!

And the first thing he does is to offer some words of comfort and assurance: “Peace be with you.” Shalom. Don’t worry; it’s not over yet. And I think that’s nice.

The second thing he does — after pausing for a few moments to take in their astonished expressions — is to ask, “Um, why are you guys freaking out? I told you *several times* what was going to happen. Do you remember any of that?”

And then, the third things Jesus does — while rubbing his tummy and looking around the room — is to ask, “You guys got any food around here?”

In other words, it was the same Jesus they had always known, and he’s acting like it’s just another Sunday evening in Jerusalem.

But in point of fact, his sudden appearance in that room — **after** his having been betrayed, tortured, executed, and entombed — is anything but normal, anything but natural, and anything but expected. Because everyone had thought that the powers-that-be had vanquished Jesus.

I mean, the religious authorities has condemned Jesus as a heretic and blasphemer, and their verdict was that Jesus was guilty as charged!

The secular authorities — the Roman governor and the military leadership — had condemned Jesus as a traitor and a rebel. And their verdict was also that Jesus was guilty as charged!

And even God seemed to confirm their verdicts, because there were no rescuing angels; there were no last-minute acquittals; and there were no surprise witnesses to challenge the testimony given against Jesus.

And so, and according to the laws of the day, Jesus got what he deserved. And that should have been the end of the story.

But it wasn't, because all along, and entirely behind the scenes, God and Jesus had been in cahoots against the powers and principalities of the world. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God was declaring to those religious and civil authorities, "This was not about you! This was not about anything you've accomplished, or even prevented. And while you may have thought that you had things well in hand, you were wrong."

You see, with today's reading, the author of Luke's gospel has brought the life and ministry of Jesus full circle. Because, if you recall, at the very beginning of Luke's gospel, we were told that the life and ministry of Jesus was to be the final act in God's plan to redeem and restore all of creation.

And so, in those hours between Good Friday evening and Easter Sunday morning, God was taking the worst that humanity could throw at Jesus, and transforming it into the best that God could give to us: our redemption and reconciliation, with God, and with each another.

And while Jesus was munching on that bit of broiled fish, and waiting for the shock to wear off, he didn't waste time trying to explain the mechanics of resurrection, or describing for them what he had been up to during the previous 72 hours.

Instead, he continued teaching them, and reminding them of the things he'd been telling them all along, and reinforcing the truth that his whole life, and death, and resurrection were always part and parcel of something bigger that God was doing in the world: that, through Jesus, God was redeeming and reconciling everyone who had ever lived back to himself.

And in the days between his resurrection and ascension, the risen Jesus appeared to lots of people:

To assure them that he was alive!

To teach them how to set their fears and doubts within the context of God's larger plan;

To help them to better understand the scriptures;

To commission them as witnesses of all that God has done in and for the world;

And to assure them that they are now ready to be his credible and reliable witnesses, throughout the world.

And all that because of what they have seen and heard; and especially because of what they now know: That Christ is risen, and our hope endures!

Today we live in a world of conflict and war, a world of poverty and disease, of neglect and prejudice, of fear and isolation. And at times, God seems powerless, if not in fact absent, in the face of all this. And despite the efforts of well-intentioned and generous people, the world, by-and-large, remains oppressive and inhospitable for many.

And today's gospel reading challenges us to answer some questions. For example:

Who or what, in our community of Stillwater, needs the presence of the risen Jesus?

And what do we need to do, and what do we need to know, in order to be credible witnesses of God's work in this world, and of what God's goals are for this world?

How might the people of St. Andrew's Church respond to what we see God doing in this world?

And, how might we meaningfully participate in God's work in this world?

That's a conversation I think we need to have. But, no matter how we answer these questions, Jesus has commissioned us to bear witness to the presence and power of God — and even, and perhaps even *especially*, in the midst of tragedy, despair, and death. Because we know something the world doesn't know: that these things are not ultimate — that they are not everlasting — and

that only God is. And God aims to redeem all of creation, and all of us, *and people need to know that.*

As it turns out, Jesus is still the talk of the town! For, wherever there is inhumanity or exploitation, wherever there is discrimination and hopelessness, there Jesus shows up in various guises, offering comfort and assurance. And he invites us to be witnesses to the fact that God intends to continue his work through us, bringing peace, unity, harmony, love, compassion, grace, justice, and mercy to a world that is broken and hurting.

The risen Jesus has made himself known to each of us in a variety of ways. And that encounter has made a difference in our lives. And as people of faith, God has called each of us to bear witnesses to his presence among us, and to do so through our words and through our deeds; because, in the end, our faith demands nothing less.

Amen.