

Pastor Roy's sermon from April 14, 2013

Two weeks ago I gave a challenge, and I hear that our supply pastor Cindy Garis last week gave a similar challenge: to search for and be aware of the Spirit of Christ's resurrection at work in our world. To look for the risen Lord at work in our lives and world!

That first weekend of Jesus' death, his friends realized that he *was* dead but is now alive! They began meeting Jesus in unexpected places. He was not. They found him mysteriously alive. He was more alive than before—he was always present to guide, to heal, to share wisdom—if they sought him.

As time passed and their own deaths approached, they learned the mystery of life without end. Those who die in Christ come to truly live beyond all imagination and wonder. We are learning that we live and die in totally in God's mercy.

Now, *we* tend to have tidy categories for what it means to be alive and dead, but those ideas crumble in the presence of the risen Christ. He is our example that living and dying are a unity that baffles us on our best days but comforts us on our worst. When we are aware of Christ's presence, we are free.

The funeral service is a reminder that in death our baptism is complete. We are united with Christ in the fullness of God's mercy--Life without end. Our lives have great potential for joy. But our eventual deaths need not be any different. We live and die in faith.

Daily we get caught up in our lives and are tempted to think we are the center of the universe. Jesus and his followers teach us otherwise.

No, we are part humanity and part of God's creation. We are well when we find our place in this world. If we get lost in ourselves, we will find misery to be our closest companion.

If we are companions with the new life springing all around us, we can be filled with joy, even when our own wishes and dreams are not fulfilled.

For example, Saul, as he hunted the followers of Christ, was closed to the new thing that God was doing. New life was springing forth and he was resisting it with all of his might. But, he has this amazing experience and suddenly realizes that the way of Christ is indeed *the way*. He suddenly finds himself in a city, alone, unable to even help himself. He is befriended by courageous friends of Christ who show him a new way of compassion.

Saul no longer needs to forcefully defend the orthodox way, he becomes an example of the way of peace. He is content to be a companion of God with no fear--no need to control. Then, he is willing to be shipwrecked, imprisoned, beaten, and generally rejected by many. He is free to love and proclaim Jesus' way of living with faith in the reign of God who is the Ground of all Being.

John the elder has a vision of the Spirit of Christ surrounded by all who love mercy and justice. The center of the universe is not each person. . .who lives the life, but the Spirit of Christ and the reign of God's mercy. . .that *is* the life. Power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing, forever and ever—not to us, but to Christ who shows us the way of God's Reign.

Last week Thomas reminded us of the challenge of believing without seeing. Saul did not see, but he

believed.

In today's reading, Peter does not see Christ until their nets are filled with fish. When someone suggests "It is Jesus," Then Peter jumps overboard to go greet him.

We, too, don't always recognize that Jesus is alive. He is alive in us and in the actions of people and creation around us.

Sometimes Jesus is among us and we miss him. Sometimes like Saul, not yet Paul, we drive his mercy away thinking we are doing God's will. Perhaps we insist on the right way and miss opportunities for good relationships and God's mercy to flow. Sometimes at first these relationships can be threatening and difficult and we'd rather steer clear.

Eventually we do see the face of Jesus and we gladly follow. The energy comes then. The joy, the peace of believing in the one who shows us our place in the universe. A place of receiving and giving goodness and life and compassion. Jesus is waiting. Jesus will not let go. Christ leads us into faith and faithfulness.

This Easter season our job remains to be waiting and watching for the risen Christ. Where is Jesus? What is Jesus doing? Are we open to God's Spirit? Are we still open?

Springtime is an example for us. The plants which are greening all around us don't question the source of their life. They simply receive it and grow. Life-giving water and nutrients. Our life giving flow is mercy and love. May we receive Christ and work to share his life every chance we get.

Thanks be to God. Amen.