

Easter 3 B 2021

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

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[Luke 24:36b-48](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Today we get a bit of Christmas in our Easter season. The gospel that we just read says, “a ghost does not have flesh and bones.” The risen Jesus has flesh and bones. “Touch me and see,” he says. And then he says what parents of teenagers everywhere have heard over and over again: “Have you anything here to eat?” What’s in the fridge? I’m hungry. Ghosts do not get hungry.

Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation of God in Jesus. “*And the Word became flesh and lived among us.*” It’s fitting that the Gospel According to Luke, which gives us the story of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and the story of the Annunciation to Mary, and the song of Mary—the Magnificat— and the shepherds watching their flocks by night— all of that Christmas stuff is in the first two chapters of Luke. And now in the very last chapter of Luke, the very last verses of his gospel, we get Jesus asking for something to eat. God becomes flesh. He becomes human. “I am not a ghost.” “Give me something to eat.” *And the Word became flesh and lived among us.* A little bit of Christmas in our Easter season.

The incarnation so important that we have our second most important holy day dedicated to it. Christmas and the incarnation are important because if heaven can spend time on earth, then earth can spend time in heaven. In other words, we are redeemable. We can partake of God and partake of heaven because God has broken down that divide. It’s kind of a metaphysical argument. If God can reside in a human being, if God can inhabit humankind, then that says something very positive and very powerful about the potential of humankind. We might not be as lost and as unredeemable as we sometimes seem to be. That’s one reason the incarnation is so important, is so essential to Christianity. That’s one reason we celebrate Christmas.

And also, Christmas affirms that our religion is not just a spiritual religion. Christianity is affirmative of the creation. Affirmative of the human body, and the family, and human culture and human society. Christianity is sacramental. It is embedded. It is material. It is historical. Christianity is in the world for the good of the world. This is really good stuff. This is really powerful stuff. This is why Christmas is such a big deal. The incarnation matters a great deal. I daresay it is the definitive characteristic of the Christian religion.

So those are two important things. First, in the words of the church father Irenaeus, the fact that God became flesh makes it possible for flesh to become holy. Second, the fact that Christ comes into the world means that our religion does not turn away from creation, nor does our religion turn away from human nature. Our religion helps creation and helps human nature to reach the

potential that our Creator has in store for us.

But in today's gospel we clearly see the third important thing about the incarnation. Compassion. The Christian religion talks about the passion of Jesus Christ. The passion according to Mark, which we heard this year on Palm Sunday. The passion according to John, which we heard this year on Good Friday. The passion means the suffering and death of Jesus. Well, if that's what passion means, the compassion means companionship in suffering. Company, companionship, commonality, community, commitment. The prefix "com" means together with. Compassion means being together in suffering. God's compassion means that he is with us in our suffering. One of the big words as Christmastime is Immanuel. The Hebrew word that means "God is with us." Immanuel. God is with us, but not just in victory. Not just in good health. "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health." Where have you heard those words before? Compassion. With us in our suffering.

That's the significance of the wounds of Jesus in his hands and feet. We saw that last Sunday in an Easter story that was in many ways quite different than this one. The story centered on the doubt and the faith of Thomas. But in both stories the wounds of Jesus are connected to the ability to recognize Jesus and to know him. On Easter Sunday, the Republican speech writer Peter Wehner published [an essay in the New York Times](#), entitled with the question, "Why Is Jesus Still Wounded After His Resurrection?" Wehner mentions how he learned that the word "vulnerable" comes from the Latin word for wound, which is *vulne*. Vulnerable. Woundable. Hurttable. The heart of God is capable of feeling pain and sorrow. That's part of what the wounds of Jesus signify. Compassion. God's compassion.

The significance of the wounds of Jesus is that this is how God's work is done. Through a love that is compassionate. Through a love that is willing to sacrifice for others. The resurrection miracle does not cancel Holy Week. On the contrary, it validates Holy Week. Christ did not suffer in vain. And men and women, neither do you. Your struggles and your wounds, and my struggles and my wounds, are not meaningless. They are often the way that God changes us for the better. They are often the result of sacrifices we have made to change the world for the better. Resurrection does not erase the past. Resurrection brings new life from the past.

So today we get a bit of Christmas. The incarnation is still in effect. Jesus still has flesh and bones. He has been to hell and back. The first letter of Peter would say that he has literally been to hell and back. But he has not become pure spirit. He still shares our humanity. The resurrection is not just God doing an impressive trick. The resurrection is God for us, God with us. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Amen.