

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,
Gibson Island, Maryland, Third Sunday of Easter, April 15, 2018.**

I like today's Gospel because it reminds me of the different ways by which God reaches out to us and by which we respond to God. Just as we are not all alike in reaching, neither are God's methods. This is why our experiences with God vary so much, but not so much as to undermine the notion of the "one and the same God."

The New Testament contains four gospels. The subject matter is the same, namely that Jesus rose from the dead and is therefore the Good News. But the relating of the subject matter varies, not in the big issues, but in the smaller ones, those that reflect the wide variety of seekers.

Last week, we read from the Gospel of John and its story of doubting Thomas. Faced with the doubt of Thomas, Jesus invites Thomas to touch the wounds, thereby confirming that the one speaking to Thomas really is the one who had been crucified. Thomas is convinced. "My Lord and my God."

This week, we read from the Gospel of Luke (**Luke 24:36b-48**) and its story of the doubting disciples. Thomas is not mentioned by name, but the invitation of Jesus to touch the wounds is mentioned. The response, though, is not "My Lord and my God." According to Luke, the response is "disbelieving and still wondering."

At this point, Jesus tries a different approach: "Have you anything here to eat?" The disciples respond with a piece of broiled fish, which the Risen Christ promptly ate. For the disciples, Jesus eating fish is proof of the Resurrection. This is a watershed moment for the disciples. The gospel notes, "Then he, Jesus, opened their minds to understand the scriptures."

A piece of fish. Touching the wounds didn't work. But a piece of fish did work, suggesting that God's operating principle is "Whatever works." And, if this is so, what an opening for you and me.

How many times has someone – a parent, a teacher, a friend – tried to explain something to you without success? Calculus comes to my mind. Well, on many of these occasions, the parent, teacher or friend will try different techniques, until something clicks. Or not, in which case the parent, teacher or friend will bring in reinforcements. In the case of spreading the Good News, you and I are the reinforcements.

What is important is not who is delivering the message, but that the message is received. Sometimes receipt, understanding, comes via touching a wound, and sometimes it comes via a piece of fish. The method is less important than the outcome.

The outcome in today's gospel is "You are witnesses of these things." And the "you" in this outcome is "all of us." God has reached us in a variety of ways, but for the same purpose. We are now witnesses. We are now the Story-tellers. We are now models of conversion. We are now disciples, with very different stories of conviction, but with the same expectation. Share the Good News.

Our first reading this morning is from the Acts of the Apostles (**Acts 3:12-19**). It begins at verse 12 of chapter 3, and references a crippled man who was healed. Here are the earlier verses: "Taking him by the right hand, Peter helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."

In today's reading, Peter notes "We are witnesses." And he goes on to say, "The faith that is through Jesus has given him (the crippled man) this perfect health in the presence of all of you." This is another way of saying – and, yes, it's a totally different context, but still appropriate – "See something, say something." "See the healing power of God in Christ, and share that experience."

Now, you might say that "I have never seen a crippled man healed, so how can I say something?" Fair enough. But, you have experienced some kind of healing yourself. You're here. You have a sense – maybe profound, maybe just sprouting – that God gave the world a wonderful gift in Jesus and that this gift is worth one's attention. "Give Christ a chance" is what you and I can in good conscience share with others, particularly those who, through friendship or chance, have shared with us a desire for something or someone more.

You and I know the "something more." And we also know people referenced in verse 6 of this morning's psalm (**Psalms 4**): "Many are saying, 'Oh, that we might see better times!'" And what do we say to those seeking "more," those seeking "better times"? We offer verse 3: "Know that the Lord does wonders for the faithful; when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me."

We have been given a message that the world needs. From our second lesson this morning (**I John 3:1-7**): “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is who we are.” Yes, we are children of God. And, more to the point of this Easter Season, we are custodians of this identity, with a responsibility to share that identity with others. And to do so in a variety of ways. Jesus had his methods, from offering his wounds to asking for a piece of fish. Our methods will be different, because they will reflect our particular gifts and talents.

But, our purpose, our calling, will be the same. God loves us, even to the point of dying on a cross, a sacrifice that probably is not in our future. That doesn't mean though that we won't bear a cross of some sort. Indeed, maybe we're bearing a cross right now. Maybe we identify with the crippled man in the temple more than with Peter who helped the man to his feet. Maybe we're the ones looking for the “more” rather than offering the “more.”

Well, one of the things life teaches us is that often we discover the “more” when we offer the “more.” When “feeling sorry for ourselves” is replaced by “feeling compassion for others.” Jesus had every reason to feel sorry for himself, but this self-concern was dwarfed by his love for others, including you and me.

His life and death are powerful examples. But even more powerful is God's decision to raise Jesus from the dead and thus extend his ministry of forgiveness. This extended ministry is the one in which you and I are now involved. We have heard the Good News. We understand that this Good News is intended for others as well as ourselves. And we have our own gifts and talents, methods of sharing, of witnessing, that might not reach all, but might very well reach some, maybe just one.

And, as we share, as we witness, as we reach, we need to remember the strategy from this morning's psalm: first “offer the appointed sacrifice,” and then “put your trust in the Lord.” This two-fold strategy – offering and trusting – applies across the board. From touching wounds to a piece of fish to whatever works. We are to take stock of our gifts and talents, and then offer, and then trust. In other words, “give Christ a chance.” He is “the more” that we have experienced, and for which others thirst. Maybe our job is to supplement the piece of fish with a glass of water. Amen.