

JESUS STOPPED BY ST. JOHN'S CHURCH YESTERDAY

Luke 24:36b-48

Jesus showed up at St. John's Church yesterday. A local film crew is shooting a movie about what might happen if Jesus were not to have come 2000 years ago, but would come and do the same deeds today that the Gospels proclaim he did back then. So, Jesus showed up at St. John's Church yesterday, along with his disciples, Mary and Martha, a man and a woman in black, a film crew, a number of our parishioners who were extras in the church scene and a borrowed coffin. Jesus and his disciples came to attend a funeral service for Lazarus. And of course in this funeral service, much as the one nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus invited his friend Lazarus to rise up from the dead. Some of those who were here for the filming tell me that despite knowing what was going on and despite it obviously being for a movie, that it was pretty astounding to hear the actor playing Jesus command a man to rise up out of his coffin, and even more astounding to see the actor playing Lazarus sit up in his coffin, dazed and confused by the new life he was experiencing.

All of us will have the opportunity to see and experience the film when producer and director Deborah Leighton brings the finished product to a parish evening presentation projected on the big screen of our north dining room wall.

Jesus showed up unexpectedly Easter evening in that upper room where his disciples had gathered behind locked doors. He appeared suddenly in their midst and they were startled and terrified. They thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus invited them to touch him, to touch his wounded hands and side and see that it was really him. He even had a bite to eat to prove he was no insubstantial ghost. But even then his disciples hardly dared to believe it for joy.

Should we be any less surprised to have Jesus turn up at a funeral service, open the casket and bring the dead to life?

- What if Jesus were to suddenly show up here, today in this sanctuary and breathe his Holy Spirit upon us?
- What if Jesus were to stand in the pulpit and challenge us to concretely serve the poorest and neediest among us, those most in need in our city and beyond?
- What if Jesus were to suddenly stand in our midst and show us his wounded hands, his wounded feet and his wounded side?
- What if Jesus were to suddenly appear and fill our hearts with longing and joy and expectation for God's coming into our lives and into our world?
- What if Jesus suddenly stood among us at the end of the service to send us out as witnesses of his love?

Well, he has and he is, and he does!

What happened on that Easter evening in the locked upper room isn't any more fantastic than what we claim to believe happens here every week in our worship. Jesus comes and is present among us. What is different since the Ascension is that he comes spiritually for we – the Church – now represent his physical Body in the world. We believe he is

present in our worship. He lives in our hearts. We receive his body broken for us and his blood poured out for us in Holy Communion. We serve him as we serve one another and as we serve those in need. His power to heal, to transform lives, to raise the dead to new life, is as potent today as ever.

And like those disciples gathered in that locked upper room we also are witnesses of these things. We are witnesses of the miracles – small and large – that happen every day in St. John's Church and wherever Jesus' life is manifest. We are the ones he sends out to share the good news of his risen life, to share it with loved ones, to our friends, to our associates, and our neighbors. We are sent not only out but also into the community to support one another, to learn and grow in that risen life of Christ. He promises to open our minds and hearts to understand the scriptures as we read, pray and study them. We are called to be witnesses of his life. We are invited to worship and celebrate his presence and power and glory. We are called to walk in his love. We are challenged to follow his call to serve the least, the lost and the last. We are witnesses of these things.

But I suspect that we are not nearly so astounded as those disciples were that Easter evening, and there's the rub. Either we don't expect Jesus to actually show up at the weekly gathering we hold in his honor, or we think that somehow through familiarity and 2000 years of repetition we have somehow domesticated Jesus. We no longer expect him to come with power and astounding life. Nothing could be further from the truth! For our Lord is alive. Jesus is present in our midst. His life is truly astounding. His resurrection is potent, powerful and real. And he invites us to experience his power. He invites us to enter into a life so real that it overcomes death and the grave. He invites us to enter into a life so fresh that we are enabled to see with new eyes, and feel with a new heart. He invites us to love with new joy. He invites us to experience a transformation from death to life so great that the chains and shackles that bind us are broken and we walk free from the dark places where we have long been held captive.

The disciples disbelief was overturned with joy in the concrete and astounding experience of Jesus' physical presence in their midst. So may our fear and doubts be overturned again and again as we experience Jesus' living presence in our midst.

Jesus came to St. John's Church yesterday for a film. Jesus has come here today and comes here week after week as we gather to sing his praises. Our beautiful sanctuary is filled with signs and symbols of his life and story. We meet him again and again as we break bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. He still calls us to be his disciples. (We celebrate his gift of new birth through water and the Spirit as we soon will baptize little Paul Ferris in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.) He still invites us to serve the world in his name. You and I are witnesses of these things.