

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert L. Hart, Easter 3, April 26, 2009, Acts 4: 5-12, Psalm 4, I John 1: 1-2:2, Luke 24: 36b-48

+In the Name of God, the Holy and Life-giving Trinity. Amen.

There's a tempting text among the portions of scripture this morning. It's the 4<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 4: "Many are saying, 'Oh, that we might see better times!'" Many are saying just that. "Oh, that we might see better times!" I think that we in Southeast Michigan need to be brutally realistic. We will see better times. We will not see Michigan recover to anything like what we have known in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a generation we'll probably see a renewed Michigan but we will not be the power- house of an industrial America. "Better times" is going to mean something new and different for us.

In the here and now, we, as the Church and specifically, we, as Christ Church, have to focus on a clear and distinct mission if we're going to be a participant in the better times to come. The word "mission" means "to be sent." And the Gospel reading from Luke this morning ends on these words of Jesus, "You are witnesses of these things." We are witnesses, as Jesus says, "to all nations." We have a mission to the world and to the city.

As we think about this and reflect on it, there's no better place to begin than with scripture.

In the Gospel story from Luke we have another dramatic and startling appearance of the risen Jesus. As in so many of these accounts, the disciples are together, a meal is on the table; it is late on the evening of the Day of Resurrection, Sunday. The two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus are excitedly telling everyone that they have seen "Jesus risen from the dead." And just as they are speaking, Jesus is among them. He says to them, "Shalom", "Peace be with you."

The disciples are terrified and confused. Jesus then demonstrates that it is he, in the flesh, the risen, transfigured flesh through which he will carry all creation into the kingdom. Jesus teaches the disciples by interpreting the scriptures. He concludes, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

If we were to outline this story, the high points would be:

- o The risen Jesus is present among the disciples.
- o He greets them with the traditional "Peace be with you."
- o The disciples recognize the risen Jesus in their midst.
- o He interprets the scriptures for them.
- o Then the risen Jesus gives them a commission to be witnesses to all nations.

And I would say to you that all those things are true right here and right now. The risen Lord is here. All that the Shalom of God means is present in our midst. We have the scriptures open before us, read in our hearing and interpreted for our day and time. And we grasp that we are witnesses for we will pray at the

conclusion of this Eucharist, "Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord."

Now, more than ever the task is to determine the shape and content of our mission in this broken and troubled time. Repentance and forgiveness of sins form the door through which we move into the Shalom of God. The people of our city and region need to know that. And they need to comprehend what the Peace of God means. For Shalom is more than a greeting, it is the content of God's kingdom. It is justice, integrity, courage, mercy, forgiveness and love working their way into the very structures of human life and community.

The Church participates in the Shalom of God. We proclaim it and we witness to it. We have the commission of God to say to the city, the region and to the State what we believe the Peace of God would look like in Michigan.

I believe, for instance, that it means the old polarizations of black and white, labor and management, Detroit and suburbs have to succumb to the Shalom of God. I believe it means learning to live with different expectations about a sustainable economy. And I believe we are given the vocation of proclaiming it, living it and of helping lead the people into a new and better future.

When Jesus gave us this commission he said it was to all nations. Jesus disclosed God's will that we become the first universally inclusive community. What would a universally inclusive community look like if it were filled with God's Peace? Would it look like what we have now?

This is our opportunity. The risen Jesus is every bit among us as he was his original disciples. Jesus is here and we are his witnesses. We can speak to the city and the world of repentance, forgiveness and of the Shalom of God that can recreate this tired earth. We can speak because we are agents of better times. We have been sent to proclaim the vision of the city of God.