

Problem: What changes after encountering the risen Christ?

-Mame Vasser, a dear member of this congregation, took a fall over a year ago and broke her hip. It is a very intense story of paramedics coming to rescue her (thank God she had one of those lifeline call buttons). Mame braved large amounts of physical therapy as well as an extra pacemaker surgery on top of everything else. Mame is now doing well at The Village Assisted Care Facility where she is able to get the help she now needs for daily tasks. Though she loves the staff and her roommates at The Village, Mame has said how much she misses her house on 4th Street that she lived in for over 50 years. "That fall changed so many things," she said. "There is no way I could go back to how things were before."

-I think Mame's thoughts are similar to what the disciples were also thinking after seeing Jesus. "Christ is risen! Wow, things are not going to be the same."

-Yet what I am sure it is frustrating for Jesus that his disciples don't really seem to get it: things have changed and you can't go back.

-As the Gospel of John says, this was the 3rd time Jesus appears to them. The first time they were in Jerusalem locked in the upper room afraid without Thomas. The 2nd time they were again locked in the Upper Room afraid with Thomas this time. The 3rd time in this story, it appears, they went back to their regular jobs: fishing, life like before.

-What happened to "I am the resurrection and the life", "love one another as I have loved you", or "be fishers of humanity"? What happened to seeing the resurrected Jesus twice and God's triumphant naming of Imanu-el (I will be with you even after the end of the age)??

-Things have changed. The world is not the same. Christ is risen! Yet, the disciples don't initially try to do anything different afterwards. They went right back to where they were comfortable.

Solution: We are being called out of our lives to be transformed by the resurrected Christ. Life can never go back to like it was.

-So how did Jesus respond to his disciples not knowing really what to do and going back to "life as before?" He comes to them as a stranger. "Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus." (v.4)

-I think this is really really important that Jesus starts off as the stranger in this story because it is the stranger that constantly reminds us we are in a new place. It is the stranger, the one who doesn't belong or who is new, who has the most capacity to show us something new.

-Even though the disciples were afraid and went back home to kinda start their old lives again, they did something amazing. They not only saw the stranger, they *accepted the invitation* to break bread with the stranger.

-It is accepting the invitation and in the eating of bread and fish with a stranger turned friend that I think brings these disciples back into the new way and world of a risen Christ.

-Some of the earliest Christian records of writings and artwork depict Holy Communion not of bread and wine, but of fish and water. There are a lot of reasons for why this was, but I think one valid reason for why it was fish and water was for early Christians to remember this story of the risen Jesus as stranger on the beach and issuing the invitation into a new world. The eating of fish is what can give us a foundation and sustenance to begin living this new way.

-This is the key, I think, for living into a changed world after the risen Christ. We need sustenance to live into a new creation that God has changed through the risen Christ.

-It reminds me of the famous saying: "Give a person a fish, you feed them for a day. Teach this person to fish, you feed them for a lifetime." Through the practice of Holy Communion, through the practice of eating with a stranger, we can be taught the new dynamics of God's new creation through Christ in a sustainable way. Through this structure we can practice this new creation and be empowered to share it with others.

- So, how has this world changed through Christ? We have had two new member classes and it was such a joy to connect more with Doug, Shirley, Mike, and Karen. For our last class on Wednesday, Shirley made the comment: "I just feel like I am part of a new family!" If we want to boil down the entirety of what God's new creation looks like through the risen Christ, I think Shirley hit it on the head: it's a new definition of family. It's a new way of relationship with each other, with the earth, and with God. It's in gathering and eating the fish together where it starts. It's in gathering and eating the fish together where we can be encouraged to do something different too.

-There has been a huge uptick of violence and rhetoric against Muslims in this country especially in the last year. Examples of why this is are pretty easy to find: a presidential candidate who has said publically that he wants to "ban all Muslims from the United States", a huge increase in harassment against Muslim school children in public schools, and a public "Montana without Muslims" campaign that stems from immigration policies within our own state. It is clear that millions of people in our own country are living in a rising fear. Is Jesus as stranger calling out to us on the beach in this situation? Are we being invited to live differently into the new creation of the risen Christ?

Implication: How has life changed for you in proclaiming the risen Christ?

-I believe we are. Now isn't the time for us to go back to our old ways of a creation that relied upon old and outdated rules. It is time for us to show others what this new family in Christ really means.

-A few of you remember that I am on the board of the United Religions Initiative, an interfaith non-profit that strives for tolerance and respect among different faith traditions.

In November this past year, some of you may remember a URI board meeting that took place right here in Missoula and the entire board coming to worship here at Our Savior's. During worship, we had Holy Communion and I gave my usual invitation to the table: Jesus ate with anyone who wanted to eat with him. After saying this, we got all prepped and ready to go, and the first person who got in line was Danya, an American Muslim from New York. As she held out her hand, she said: "Well, you said Jesus would eat with anyone and I definitely would like to eat with Jesus today." Now, does Danya have the same understanding of Holy Communion as I do? Does her faith see Christ in the same way as mine? No. But, was Danya Jesus Christ on the beach inviting me into a new creation? She definitely was. So I made the decision to give her the bread and wine of Christ because in a new creation Danya is part of my new family in Christ. I don't know exactly all of the theological "in's" and "out's" of it, but I know she is. That is what it means for me to live in a new creation of the risen Christ. Things are not the same and there is now is not the time to go back to old ways.

-I hope and pray that you might think about how things have changed for you in this new creation of the risen Christ. What is the new family of Christ to you? May you heed the invitation of Jesus as stranger on the beach to new ways of living as family. May the gathering around and eating of Holy Communion nourish and sustain you as Children of God. Amen.