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Worship and Discipleship by Margo Geesing

“We are an Easter People”

We have made it through Lent and we are now in the time of Easter! We are an Easter People. Our faith tells us that Jesus, risen from the dead by his own power, is the reason for our faith. We celebrated the Lord’s birth at Christmas, we celebrated the Lord’s presentation to the world at the Epiphany, we celebrated the Lord’s baptism by John and the beginning of his ministry with the calling of the disciples, we celebrated the Lord’s temptation in the desert, we celebrated the Lord’s transfiguration, we celebrated the Lord’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, we celebrated the Lord’s Supper on Maundy Thursday, we celebrated the Lord’s death on Good Friday. All of these, although special times, are not why we have faith in Jesus Christ. We are all born, we all celebrate milestones in our lives, we all are tempted, and, one day, we too, will die. So did Jesus. The thing that Jesus did that made him different was that he rose from the dead by his own power. None of us can do that. No one in history has done that; except Jesus. Easter. The celebration of the resurrection of Jesus is what is the absolute core of our faith. When we were baptized, we were baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, it’s time to celebrate! It’s time to sing “Alleluia!”

First Sunday in April we hear the story of Doubting Thomas from the Gospel of John. I can identify with Thomas. He thinks: *I know that Jesus died, how can you have seen him? This is a hoax, and one in very poor taste.* So, yes, I would want to see it myself. I would want to touch him. We have an advantage over his followers of the time, we have their witness to the resurrection. What does that mean to us today? If we believe in the resurrection, if we embrace faith in the Risen Lord, if we call Him Lord and Savior, if we call His Father, “*Father*”, if we have the Gifts of the Holy Spirit within us, if we have the gift of faith, if we have the Breath of Life within us, if we allow Him to have a claim on us then there needs to be a response from us. The one thing we cannot say; we should not say is, “*Yes, I believe*” and then walk through our lives as if we did not. *The other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.”* The difficulty of trying to go it alone in faith is that we only see ourselves – our own thoughts, reflection, wants, and needs. For Church to happen, we need a community. There are times in our own lives where we do not see the Lord working and we need the community to say, “*We have seen the Lord.*” And sometimes we need to be the one to say it to others.

The second Sunday in April we have a similar story from the Gospel of Luke. Jesus appears to the disciples and they are all in turmoil. He bids them peace and goes on to prove he is not a ghost by eating. He calls them to touch him. Touching Jesus. How can we dare? Even when He says we should. We need to. We need to so we can come to an understanding, flawed as it may be, of the Risen Lord. We need to be Word and Sacrament to one another in the world. **YOU** may be the only way someone else has of touching Jesus. Jesus bids us all peace in our lives. Not necessarily the peace of the world, but the peace that comes from being loved absolutely. The peace that can only come from Jesus.

Shepherd vs Hired Hand. The third Sunday of April we are again in the Gospel of John. Jesus is doing a discourse on what a good shepherd would do. These are a people who understand what a shepherd is and does. Jesus goes as far as to tell them that a good shepherd is willing to die for his sheep. Other than my children and grandchildren; and my husband [maybe] am I really conscience of being willing to die for anyone. Not really what one tends to think about. But, having someone who is willing to do that; that's is an amazing sign of love. And Jesus did not just **say** he would but **actually died** for each and every one of us, individually. So, the question then is: who do we look to be our shepherd? What do we look for? We need a shepherd who is just; protective; understanding; brave; looking out for the weak, poor, outcast, and lost; the one willing to lay down his life for the smallest sheep. There are a lot of people in leadership positions that give minimal effort, pursue their own agenda, ignore the common good, to whom the poor, weak, infirmed are invisible, get out when the getting is good for them – these are hired hands. We are looking for and need a good shepherd! We have found one in Jesus. Now is the time for us to go and introduce others to THE Good Shepherd!

The last Sunday of April we are still hearing from John. This is Jesus' story of the vine and the branches. Jesus again tells us the requirement for discipleship: remain in him and allow him to remain in us. He directs us to ask for what we need, and it will be done. This is done repeatedly in the Gospels. Jesus wants us to depend on him. To pray. To trust that that the Father will give us what is good for us. I have a grape vine in my yard. Actually, it's my husband's. I do nothing with it except water it occasionally when it's been a while between rains and he forgets to. It goes crazy occasionally when it hasn't been pruned. When it doesn't get watered enough, the leaves fall off, the fruit is small and bitter. If it gets too much sun, the branches get brittle and break if you look at them funny. But the stock, that vine, just keeps going year after year in spite of neglect, not enough attention, and just plain old forgetfulness. Jesus is that vine. We are the branches and need a lot of attention and most of all, we need to stay close to the vine. And what of the fruit we bear? Are we sweet or bitter? Are we tiny and shriveled or plump and juicy? Are we straggly little stick branches or are we strong and robust and able to weather storms and winds? Are we connected closely with the vine or are we just hanging on at the edges?