

Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: 1John 1-2:2, Luke 24: 36-49

"Heavenly Reunion"

Some very powerful readings we had today. I would be remiss if I did not address the words from our second reading from 1 John. They are very familiar words and since we started using the ACNA 2019 Book of Common Prayer, a part of the service that the celebrant prays are the Comfortable Words. They come right after the Confession and Absolution of sins when those words are declared. One of the declarations comes from 1John 2:1-2, which is a part of the reading today. In the Comfortable words we use a word that is not everyday speech – saying, “He is the propitiation for our sins.” I have always tried to explain that as the payment and satisfaction of the debt of our sins, but I want you to hear the words directly from the Scripture: *“But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”* (1 John 2:1-2 NIV) The atoning sacrifice. That is powerful indeed, and we have Jesus to thank for that. He did this once, so that we might be able to live.

People often think that ‘resurrection’ simply means ‘life after death’ or ‘going to heaven’, but in the Jewish world of the first century it meant a new embodied life in God’s new world; or if you will - a life after ‘life after death’. But the new body which will be given at the end is not identical to the one that we die with. In an act of new creation, God will make a new type of body, no longer subject to death, out of the old one. I look forward to that – because I will no longer have all these titanium parts. I don’t want to die – but when the time comes I will willingly go – and when the time comes for me to be given a new body – yes, Lord, yes Lord, yes, yes Lord! Take my metal and let it go!

In Jesus’ case this happened right away, there was no decaying of His body, so that the new body was actually the transformation of the old one. I think that for the rest of us - our bodies will need a complete act of new creation. The new body will belong in both heaven and earth. People have often said to me ‘what about cremation?’ ‘what if I am cremated?’ Don’t test God – He created you in the first place and He can re-create you from dust or ashes or anything else. What about people who have been in the ground for 1,000 or 2,000 years? They are not there anymore! God can re-create. That is what being God is.

I must tell you that at the end of the book of Revelation, heaven and earth will finally be joined together into one, fused together - at last if you will. Jesus’ new Resurrection body is at home in both earth and heaven, and is evident in that He shared a meal with the Apostles in today’s Gospel, and was about to bodily ascend to the Father in heaven, forty days after Passover.

Today’s reading of the Holy Gospel of Luke – comes right after the risen Jesus meets some of His followers, on Easter Sunday, before going to the Upper Room, on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24) They did not recognize Him – until Jesus broke bread with them. He had explained to them about the sacrifice that had to take place to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. They knew Him well, but His body was different – He had been transformed into His

Resurrection body – for He was now perfected and ready for heaven. I believe it was the same one that Peter, James, and John, saw on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Jesus then met with His Apostles and He said to them, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, *"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* (Luke 24:44-47 NIV)

Jesus' words are similar to His great commission in Matthew 28, saying that the heart of being His follower is the personal turning away from sin, and celebrating God's forgiveness, which is after all at the heart of the Lord's Prayer itself. Repentance and forgiveness – these two words are the agenda which can change the world. Our world today is full of disagreements, large and small, only a few of which get into the newspapers or the TV news. Nations, ethnic groups, political factions, tribes, and economic alliances struggle to be the 'top dog.' Each one of these groups are keeping score of the others – and ready to go to the press to battle it out, telling stories of the atrocities committed by the others. All they can do is point fingers at one another. You know what I have said about pointing fingers – when you point a finger at someone – there are 3 more pointing back at you! Let us face it, the only way forward is the one we all find the hardest: repentance and forgiveness. The resolute application of the Gospel, under the Lordship of the Risen Jesus, is the only way forward towards the creation of new hope and possibilities.

What the Apostles do not realize is that Jesus' time with them is now at an end. Right after the words of today's Holy Gospel, Jesus led them out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, near Bethany. He ascends to the Father in heaven, and they returned to the Temple, worshipping Him and praising God. There is more to this account, because Luke, who gave us this Gospel reading, was also the author of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

I want to share with you words from the first chapter of Acts, that will fill you with hope and blessings. Luke wrote: *"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."* (Acts 1:4-9 NIV) Verses 8 and 9 are some of my very favorites in all of Scripture. In just 10 days, the Apostles would be filled with, and baptized with the Holy Spirit – on the Day of Pentecost. In a little over a month, on May 23rd, we will celebrate Pentecost, which is called the 'birthday of the church.' It is the day when the

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Apostles became strong in the Holy Spirit and went into the world to proclaim the truth about the Risen Jesus. The Day of Pentecost will be a special day for Saint Andrew's Anglican Church, because it was on the Day of Pentecost 2013 that Saint Andrew's Anglican Church officially came into being. Many of you here today remember. On that day Bishop Neil Lebhar came and knocked on the door, and a procession came into the church. I was not here but I have seen the pictures and have heard stories as Saint Andrew's Anglican Church came into being, renting this building from Saint Paul's Roman Catholic Church, and became strong in the Holy Spirit – leaving the unbiblical ways of the Episcopal Church, and went from there to proclaim the truth about the Risen Jesus. We are His witnesses, who praise and worship Him – longing for the day when we are reunited with Him. And won't that be a heavenly reunion!