

Sunday April 24 2022 Easter 2 Authentic and New in Christ

Acts 5:27-32 John 20:19-31

What impresses today's 14-34 years olds? It is something that previous generations assumed and took for granted when information is shared. When this occurs it is done with sincerity and truth. The problem for many today, is that when a statement is made, questions are asked, answered or even tested and questioned further. With everyone's phone or computer close by, the statement offered in sincerity is further tested or rebuked by the likes of the internet. So when a statement is made like—It's a beautiful sunny day and a high of 15oC. Many people have the ability to pick up their phones, check with the Weather Network and get the most recent weather forecast. Is the statement by one person not valid? Lost to discussion? Or just what happens? The computer/phone/internet provides up to date answers and this reflects the need of what is deemed to be most important the facts. This then may cause us to either say nothing or only speak with authority because of another source? Or might we even ask, what is real and authentic in our world?

Observers of younger generations report that what impresses this age range is authenticity. This is the quest for being sincere, truthful, and up to date with facts in all that is said and done. For often, what happens is that we dress up or cover up what is real and authentic in the world for the sake of protecting others from those things which really do occur. The church has often done this in the past, but we know that in this post-pandemic era we need to be real and authentic and to share the message that needs to be shared. This message is the one Jesus told Mary the morning of his resurrection. "Go and tell others- I am alive." But if this were the only message of the church how would we do what Jesus says?

Who are we as the church right now? How are we authentic and real in this almost post pandemic era when everything seems to have changed from 2019 and early 2020? What was deemed normal has been spun around and now like many people on Earth we wonder and worry and wait for what is to come. We wonder if the world is facing its Revelation end times, if the problems of Earth's climate can be reversed or whether the Resurrection of Jesus can make or still make a difference in people's lives.

Our reading from John 20 is the story that many people can relate with today. The evening of the first day of Jesus' resurrection, the disciples are meeting in a room with the doors locked. They are afraid of the Jews and what they might do to them. Jesus then comes and

stands among them and says, "Peace be with you." One can only imagine the look on the disciples who are now seeing the Resurrected Jesus in the room with them. Were they afraid, anxious, shy, fearful? What do you say to the One who was dead and is now alive? Jesus probably felt the tension in the room. He shows them his hands and side. It is then that they rejoice because they realize it is Jesus, the Teacher and Master. They were skeptical, fearful and now they are laughing and praising Jesus. They are joyful in this moment.

But Jesus' visit is not just about showing them that he is alive. He tells them again: Peace be with you. And then give them their orders to serve. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." We are not told how long Jesus stayed with them nor the nature of their conversation after this. Yet what is significant is that Jesus showed them his hands and side.

Thomas the disciple was not present when Jesus came. The other 10 told them that they had seen Jesus. Thomas said, Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Thomas is the disciples for today's younger generations. Thomas had experienced many disappointments to embrace the gospel uncritically. He wanted hands on proof that Jesus was really alive. He had seen Jesus arrested, tried, denied, whipped and then walked through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha. He saw him on the cross and then later he hid. This was the man whom he followed in faith and trusted to bring about change in the world as he knew it. Yet Jesus died a cruel death. And now the disciples say he is alive? How could he get his hopes up?

Just think about the young generation of today—families have become blended, challenged, changed; what used to be against the law is sold in stores for personal consumption, gambling is a means of raising government money, and with the pandemic there is a disconnect with institutional learning and education as a whole. There is also the slash of dreams and work and all the things that we perceive as negative. No wonder they and we all look for what is real and authentic in our lives. And like Thomas, we want proof of God's transforming activity. Who is God calling to provide it? The people in our church family today.

Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared. Thomas' doubt was based in skepticism and his lack of trusting the other disciples. After all one had betrayed Jesus and sold him for arrest. Another had denied him, and still others hid from the Jews in order to be safe. But when Jesus came amongst them, he was not there. What if Jesus physically came into this sanctuary right

now? Would there be skeptics outside the walls? Would there be people watching on livestream thinking we planned it and an actor was here? Yes-why because when we do not experience an event ourselves we need to hear someone else's version of what happened.

Like on Friday here at Glenwood! Sometime overnight on Thursday a cat made its way to the top of our sanctuary roof. If you are not familiar with the shape of our church building please take a look at the website. The cat was on top of the peak of the roof and stayed there. When we noticed it was still there I received emails, phone calls at the church and then to my house about this cat on the roof. I made a few calls- to the City of Windsor, the humane society and to the non emergency fire department. A cat on the roof is not a common occurrence and the protocols are just not written down as to what to do. Anyway, eventually reps from the humane society came, the fire department came with their triple length ladder came and rescued the cat. The cat is safe and at the humane society. But the comments on the South Windsor Watch Facebook page are over the concern of the cat, the lack of action by us, and why we wouldn't let someone climb up and get it down. The cat climbed up and the cat probably could climb down on its own. But people were concerned because rain was forecast. Yet the interpretation of why we let the cat suffer on the roof was what was shared. Someone even put a bowl of cat food at the base of the roof for it. The real story? Protocols have to be followed; limited personnel are available and liability is an issue as we did not want anyone or the cat hurt. So what occurred and remarks on Facebook were not filled with truth, but projections of emotions, or should have and yet underlying all of them was that we care for this cat.

When Thomas expressed his need to see Jesus he really expressed what the disciples had experienced in those few minutes when they saw Jesus in their midst. They were fearful and afraid. This is why Jesus said, "Peace be with you." He could have said, "It's ok, calm down it's really me." But by sharing his peace- he calmed them down anyway.

The following week the disciples were together and even though the doors were shut Jesus came and stood amongst them. Peace be with you. Then going to Thomas he said, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." But then he also states, Do not doubt but believe. Thomas they answers him, "My Lord and my God." Jesus then states what is so important to our faith understanding today. Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Jesus tells Thomas, "Don't doubt but believe." WE need to share these words of Jesus with all people. Don't doubt—believe. But what are we asking people to believe? Christ arose

from death? And that he is real and authentic. Jesus' story needs to be shared to the many who are walking a path that is not clear, confused or questioning life itself. Jesus' story is real- and being a Christian is not about perfection. It is about engaging transformation process of becoming more like Jesus Christ. To become like Jesus who is real means becoming authentic in faith. Authentic Christians don't pretend they are perfect. But when they mess up, they are quick to admit it and get back in step with Christ through understanding God's gift of forgiveness of sins. They understand the grace of God and are also willing and able to quickly give His grace to others. An authentic Christian is one who sincerely strives to be the "real deal."

As Peter and the apostles testified before the council in Acts 5, they obeyed God rather than human authority to teach about Jesus death and resurrection. They were witnesses to Jesus Passion, and know this experience was real. They believed in Jesus and the Spirit of God who was with them. And they continued to tell His story. But what about you?

How are you telling others Jesus' story from death to Life? Are you having doubts? We all do from time to time but it is in telling the story that the authenticity of Jesus on your life will be shared anew. This is the campaign now on throughout the US and border cities in Canada. Some of you might have seen ads under the name HE GETS US> this is a religious campaign aimed at influence attitudes and perceptions about Jesus. It is also calling Christians to reflect Jesus more authentically in how they love others. They also ask people who want to know more to go to the website and they will be connected to local churches in their area. Glenwood Church is one such church. The ads are broadcast on tv and available through Youtube, but the message is what Jesus said to Thomas, Don't doubt believe.

Christ arose from death for your sake. Do you believe this? We share this message in the name of Jesus who offers us peace in this life. Peace that cannot come from anywhere else; peace that is from God's Spirit received with hope. Jesus breathed on his disciples the gift of peace. Let us receive His peace and believe and let us pray

Search us O God and know our hearts. Test us and know our anxious thought. Point out what offends you and lead us to life everlasting. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

PLEASE WATCH THIS VIDEO_- it is available also on YOUTUBE at hegetsus.com