

From The Pastor

Transitions and change are never easy. We are, to be sure, people of habit. When something changes, there is an almost immediate reaction of resistance. Depending on the kind of change that happens, the reaction can be either internal or external. An external reaction might be to complain, or scream and shout about the way it was, the way it used to be, or the way it should always be. An internal reaction can go anywhere from anger to confusion. A sense of loss and instability is often experienced. As the internal mood is metabolized, it will often elicit an external reaction that may be either positive or negative.

How did the first disciples come to peace over the change of a dead friend who is now alive? How do we today come to a working understanding and acceptance of the Resurrection of Jesus? He who was dead is now alive. What do you do with that?

Through several weeks of the Easter season we hear of the various appearances of Jesus and the reaction of those present. The account we hear today is that of the two disciples who had encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Not given the full account, we hear of their return to the others to give witness to what had happened to them. Before they get a chance to spend their excitement and tell the story, they are upstaged by the confirmation of the Lord's presence by those in the upper room. This is where our reading today picks up.

Seeing is believing. They believed in the Resurrection of Jesus because they saw him and encountered him on the road and in the sharing of bread. They did not realize they were seeing him on the road. It is only after the bread scene that they realize it is Jesus, whereupon he vanishes from their sight.

Today's account is more concrete and measurable. Jesus comes into their presence and he speaks, he eats some fish, and reminds them that he had previously told them that all this was to happen. It is all still pretty mind blowing, but coming a little closer to a normative way of seeing and relating to the reality of hard experience. Fundamental ways of knowing and experiencing natural physical laws seem to have changed. Someone we know by hard evidence was dead, and now we see and know by the same evidence of his presence that he is alive.

The internal experience is to be startled and terrified. The external reaction was rejoicing. It is not surprising then, that Jesus first greets them with words of peace. "Peace be with you".

This greeting becomes the bridge from the old way of knowing to the new way of knowing Jesus. This is a change like no other change they, or we, have ever experienced. The dead come to life and offer peace. How do we deal with that kind of change?

The old way of knowing Jesus was in the flesh; the way we know and relate to one another today. The new way of knowing and relating to Jesus is now through the Spirit. His presence is a spiritual presence. This spiritual presence is just as real and effective as if he were here in the body. How do we get from here to there?

The post Resurrection appearances of Jesus were essential for the first believers. Something had to bridge the gap from being dead, to coming alive again in a way that was concrete and believable. Eventually however, Jesus would leave us in the flesh, and remain only in the Spirit, as he does today. These early believers played an essential role in witnessing to their experience of seeing the risen Christ. They saw him, encountered him, heard his voice, and felt his touch. Their word and experience is a bridge to our faith. But there is another step that they, and we, must take.

Most of the Resurrection appearances have Jesus speaking a word of peace to those in his presence. This word of peace is more than a calm greeting. It serves many purposes. First, it is a word of forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus is not mad, or disappointed with those who abandoned him in his darkest hour. He knew his purpose and accomplished it. His word of peace is healing and disarming. He is at peace, and they should be at peace with him.

Further, this peace is a deep spiritual peace. More than the surface greeting to calm nerves, it is an invitation to a deep spiritual peace that is meant to transform the inner understanding of all who accept and believe in Jesus. The transition from a physically present Jesus in the flesh, to Jesus who is spiritually present in a powerful way has to be made. Jesus himself is inner peace. Those who believe in Jesus know and accept the inner peace of his presence. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, who is the fullness of love. No longer present in the body, Jesus is now fully present in the Spirit in tangible and evident ways. This is a big change for those who depend on hard evidence and experience. For those who believe, it is no longer this way. Jesus is present and alive in real and powerful ways. The wasted energy of resistance is fruitless. Accept the presence of Jesus and the power of his peace.