

Trinity United Methodist Church

"Thoughts For Troubled Times"

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Second Sunday After Easter The Pastor's Thoughts

Luke 24:13-35



Consider what you might do if one Saturday afternoon, your doorbell suddenly rang. Lurching out of your armchair, you shuffle to the door and pull it open. To your shock and amazement, you are confronted with glaring lights, video cameras and a guy holding an over-sized check for ten million dollars. Against all odds, you have won the sweepstakes, the lottery, the big cash giveaway. What do you think might be your first reaction? The film shot of most of these big winners usually shows them with their mouths and their eyes wide open, dancing around while screaming "I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" Two conflicting emotions race through their systems at the same time: first, their disbelief that stems from the cultivated rationale that "Nobody ever wins these things" and "The odds against winning are astronomical," coupled with, second, unbridled joy - "Yes, yes, yes, it's really happened to me," "Our lives are changed forever," "It's what we've always hoped for!" Sweepstakes winners are probably our best current example of how people look and react when they "disbelieve for joy."

Luke's description of the reaction Jesus' disciples displayed when the risen Christ at last appeared before them is perfect -- they "disbelieved for joy." When Jesus died on the cross, they had sealed away all their hopes in his lonely tomb. Perhaps, in their depths, they still heard Jesus' words about his death and resurrection. But like winning a big lottery jackpot, the chances of such a miracle actually occurring were perhaps one in . . . an eternity? Still, wasn't there that one chance? As Jesus suddenly stood in their midst, the fear and the denial that first seized the disciples' minds and hearts was still tinged with that "one in 10 million" hope. As Jesus spoke to them, that tiny flicker of faith suddenly erupted into joy. Joy unlooked for and joy unexpected slowly spread out over the disciples' hearts and consumed their whole beings. The miracle of the Resurrection had happened. The proof stood before them calmly eating a fish!

When was the last time we can recall being consumed with overwhelming, unexpected joy? By its very nature, we don't expect to encounter such joyfulness in our lives on a regular basis. And it seems our carefully scheduled, minute-by-minute monitored lifestyles are specially designed to exclude the possibility of unqualified, unlooked for joy from our life experiences. We expect to be harried and harassed, stressed and sapped. At best, we hope to schedule a little time for peace and quiet and a little fun into our lives. But joy? To be honest, we're almost afraid to believe it! I've shared the story before of preparing in 1963 for my second year of college, or to be more accurate, what I hoped would be another year if I could get the money together. My parents couldn't afford to send me, I had no rich relatives, so I was on my own. I'd worked a student job (work Scholarship) at school, as an auto mechanic off campus and a men's clothing salesman on weekends and I worked two jobs that summer. I was, however, still short some \$500, which in 1963 was a lot of money. As August approached, I received a phone call from a realtor in Harrisburg asking me to come to the office. I lived in Philadelphia, hadn't ever been to Harrisburg, let alone know anyone there, so this was truly out of the blue. I went, and after identifying myself, I was told "we understand you need \$500 for college. Here is a check." No explanations, nothing to sign, no strings attached. To this day, I have no idea where that money came from or why, but it enabled me to go to college another year. An unexpected blessing that you are almost, heck I was, afraid to believe in. The ensuing years have held many challenges, times when I was ready to just throw in the towel and give up, but a "miracle" has always taken place and whatever God intends for me moves forward.

That's pretty much how I feel about Easter and the Easter experience. I love Easter Sunday, especially Sunrise services, I feel excited about what I believe and have been taught, that new hope has entered the world and we are no longer the prisoners of sin and death, but in the weeks that follow, as the world around me doesn't change and pressures continue to build, I begin to falter. I want to believe in a new beginning, but I'm almost afraid to believe for fear of being disappointed. I can identify with the disciples and probably would, along with Thomas, want to touch, at least to pinch, to ensure that the savior who stood before me was real.

Upon reflection, perhaps the fault lies in my expectations. Those sweepstakes and lottery winners, for all their sudden wealth, are all too often bankrupt within a decade if not sooner. They thought the money would change everything, but it didn't change them. My hopes, that on Easter Sunday, with the empty tomb, all my doubts and misgivings would be swept away, that the world would suddenly be a better place, the "kingdom of God" spoken of in scripture where all people recognized their oneness under God and dealt with each other accordingly, those expectations were unrealistic because, among other things, they didn't include any change in me! The change that the Risen Christ brought into the world wasn't the sudden abolishment of injustice or of empires; it was the incremental change in men's hearts as they realized that they were no longer the prisoners of sin or of their past. The change that occurred and is occurring in the world takes place as changed men and women witness to that change in their daily lives and impact the world around them. Christ risen in us, is Christ risen in the world! A miracle has taken place, and we can believe it because we are part of it! Feel the Spirit, and let that joy change the world around you.

Pastor Mike