

SERMON: 2018/04/15 (3rd Sunday in Easter, Year B) - Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7;
Luke 24:36b-48_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

Who (here) can do really convincing animal sounds?

Anyone?

Can you roar like a lion?

"Me-ow!" like a cat?

Or "Nee-haw!" like a donkey?

Go on: I want a volunteer to demonstrate for us.

...

And who can imitate a monkey?

A chimpanzee?

You?

...

Yes!

Its quite easy isn't it? to pretend to be an animal.

And why is that?

Why is so much of our behavior very similar to that of our pets and the creatures in the zoo or those roaming the savannah? Hm?

Why?

Because, in so many *fundamental* ways, we're not actually very different from the things we eat and stroke and take for "walkies."

An uncomfortable thought, right?

But hard to dispute.

And one found in the Bible: [Eccl. 3:18-19; 2 Pt. 2:10-13].

And yet, the Evangelist John - one of Jesus' closest, *youngest* friends - says that those who follow Him - those who confess their mistakes and naughtiness and invite the Holy Spirit into their hearts and lives - *they 'are God's children now'* [v. 2]; which means that to be a "*Christian*" is to (begin to) become something *better*, more '*[b]eloved*' by Him and more in substance like His angels [see: Mt. 22:30]; something special and *more* than natural, [e.g. 1 Cor. 15:53].

And doesn't that sound great?

Liberating?

Exciting?

Shall we pray?

Let's pray: Father God...

[Dismiss children.]

'Jesus [came] and stood among the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." [And t]hey were startled and terrified.' [v.37]

Does their reaction to Jesus' appearance "strike" you as odd?

I mean, I get that they were 'startled'.

That bit makes sense, right?

They were together chatting - excitedly - about all of these eyewitness testimonies, which were "flooding" in following the discovery of the empty tomb and the "ghostly" messenger in white sitting by '[t]he collapsed shell of the grave clothes...still intact, lying on the rock ledge' [n.1] where Christ's body had been laid.

And so His sudden arrival among them, right in the middle, smiling and saying "Hi!", unhurt *and alive* was going to make them jump.

I get that.

If I'd been there, I think I'd have leapt so high into the air (with surprise) as to make NBA scouts drool.

But 'terrified'?

Why?

It was their rabbi, wasn't it?

They *knew* Him: the 'Prince of Peace', [Is. 9:6].

So, why were they afraid?

[Pause.]

I believe their fear of Jesus is connected - at least in part - with the phrase that Luke records Peter using in this morning's Acts reading where he said that people should '[r]epent...and turn to God so that your sins may be *wiped out*.' [Acts 3:19]
Wiped out.

That's an interesting phrase.

You know, when George "Dubya" Bush invaded Iraq after 9/11, an author of a recent biography claims that he took a phone-call from Marine command in the "field," who warned him that the fight against the militia known as "Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army" was going to be a bloody one, and the president was in no mood for

excuses:

“Kick ass”, he replied. And “[i]f someone tries to stop the march to democracy, we will seek them out and kill them. We must be tougher than hell.... Our will is being tested, but we are resolute. Stay the course! [...] Be confident! Prevail! We are going to wipe them out!” [n.2]

The term is an uncompromising one.

It allows for no qualification.

No exceptions.

And, as such, is perfect for belligerent, bombastic pep talks.

There’s nothing sweet or soft about it.

And it communicates one thing: “That’s it. Enough. I’m done. We’re putting an end to this right now.”

And that’s *exactly* why the Apostle uses it in his evangelistic “pitch” in today’s text. - because this is what the Scriptures reveal about God’s agenda vis-a-vis the disorder and the disobedience in His creation: that, eventually, He will “wipe it out.”

And the one to bring an end to the mess we’ve made of our lives and our families and our cities is His Son, the Messiah; who Jesus claimed to be and now, *by His resurrected, I’ve-just-beaten-the-grave appearance*, proves Himself to be.

The disciples, then, are thinking to themselves: “O. M. G. - *literally(!)* in Thomas’ case [see: [Jn. 20:28](#)]: Is this it?

Is this ‘Judgment Day’?

The eschaton?

Is my time-card about to be “punched”?”

And “Oh oh!” is the right and proper and clear-minded response *if* that’s why Jesus visited them on that occasion.

But it wasn’t.

For He came ‘into the world [not] to condemn the world, but to save [it]’, [[Jn. 3:17](#)].

The “wiping out,” then, has been postponed - *delayed*.

It is being held in check - like flood-waters behind a dam, said Jesus [[Lk.](#)

[17:26-27](#)] - by the love of the Trinity for the *Second Coming* - when He would *return* from Heaven.

But, at that point in time, He hadn’t yet ascended.

To us these facts are - *hopefully(!)* - obvious, but they certainly weren’t on that day in that locked room.

And Jesus, He saw that, which is why He went on to, as we hear, "open" 'their minds to understand' such things.

In that brief preceding prelude though, their hearts would have been in their mouths.

(Is that an expression here? Or just an English idiom?)

And the question they'd have been asking themselves is: "Is my life so tied up with sin [see: [Prov. 5:22](#)], so *enmeshed* with muck and (moral) mire that I won't survive the "wiping out" of it?" "Will what's left (afterward) be me? - in any significant sense of the term. Or, will I be extinguished?"

As Jews, you see, they knew (from their tradition) that, in the words recorded in *Zechariah*, that humanity will be 'put...into the fire, [and] refine[d]...as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.' [\[3:9\]](#)

Words echoed - *reinforced*, that is - in *Daniel* and *Jeremiah* and *Malachi* and on and on.

This is a provocative thought, isn't it?

And it should cause in you a mix of emotion - as it did in the Apostles: they also felt 'joy' at seeing Jesus, [\[Lk. 24:41\]](#).

And that needs no explanation!

Their three years of following Him around, of enjoying the attention of crowds, yes, had also seen them enduring an "avalanche" of taunts and criticism and even death threats.

Now, they're dedication to this divisive, controversial miracle-worker is (finally) vindicated.

Their personal sacrifices of time and wealth and discomfort - the gamble of trusting in Him, of taking Him at His word - pays off.

And yet maybe you still feel as they first did at the very beginning of the passage? Conflicted.

In two minds - despite the fact that you're sitting here today.

Perhaps you've some doubts.

But look how Jesus doesn't leave His followers in that confusion: He seizes hold of a charbroiled fish and begins munching on it, [\[Lk. 24:42\]](#):

"This is no illusion!

No hallucination.

Behold my reality," He seems to say.

"And *confront it.*"

It's okay, He would also add, to not be certain of every detail of every doctrine; to

have some questions. And much will be forever excluded in mystery, [see, e.g.: Is. 55:58].

But Christ does want to bring men and women to a place of conviction; of *transforming* conviction.

“Paralysis by analysis” doesn’t do anyone any good, and often can be merely an excuse - a charade - to avoid genuine commitment.

And yet that’s what we’re called to.

Genuine, full-blooded, *whole-hearted* commitment by which our lives, John assures us, will be “purified”! [1 Jn. 3:3]

Let’s reflect.

Footnotes:

1. McDowell, Josh and McDowell, Sean (2009), *Jesus: Dead or Alive*, Ventura, C. A.: Regal (Gospel Light), 9.
2. Smith, Jean Edward (2016), *Bush*, New York, N. Y.: Simon & Schuster, 398.