

## Sermon: 2021/04/18 (3rd Sunday of Easter, Year B) - Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; &, Luke 24:36b-48\_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

### Kids' Talk: Through the Looking Glass After Easter

[Full-length mirror. Sign with the words 'SON OF GOD' written on it but  
"mirrored".]

I admit it.

I like symmetry.

And I'm fascinated by how much there is of it in The Bible.

At the very beginning of His ministry, for example, Jesus spent *forty* days in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil.

And, basically, that temptation came down to a single, annoying question:

The Devil, hoping to undermine Jesus' self-confidence; His motivation to salvation, kept asking Him: "Are you *really* the Son of God, the Savior?" [Mt. 4:3] - and at that stage there might have been some doubt: Jesus hasn't performed any miracles after all.

It was a bit like looking at this sign.

Can you tell what it says?

[Wait for response.]

*Right!*

Everything is backwards, its not immediately obvious, but you can just about read that it says "SON OF GOD."

It isn't *clear*, though.

Well, at the end of Jesus' ministry, He then spent *forty* days with the Apostles, appearing to them after His resurrection.

And again that is the question which is everyone's minds.

Is Jesus the Son of God?

Yes.

The Empty Tomb proves it:

Jesus' *forty* days after coming out of the grave show the world that He *is* the Son of God, the Savior.

That period of time was like a mirror to what happened in the wilderness at the beginning.

[Hold up sign so that it is visible in the mirror.]

Now, we see!

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

## 'Terrified' of Jesus.

Luke chapter twenty-four, verses thirty-six and thirty-seven - the very first verses of our gospel passage this morning:

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

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, presumably - *excitedly*, about all of the many eyewitness testimonies, which were "flooding" in following the discovery of the empty tomb, the angel, and '[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, unhurt *and alive* was always going to make them jump.

Who wouldn't have "jumped," right?

Who wouldn't have been 'startled' by that!

(A dead man not...well, dead.)

If I'd been there, I think I'd have leapt so high into the air - 'startled' - so as to make NBA scouts drool.

But 'terrified'?!

Why?!

It was their rabbi, after all;

the "meek and mild" 'Prince of Peace': [Is. 9:6].

So, why were they afraid?

This is the question confronting us this morning.

[Pause.]

I believe their fear; their "terror" of Jesus goes much deeper than the fact that, *momentarily*, some (mistakenly) thought He was a 'ghost'.

I think their being 'terrified' was in part connected to what we heard Peter say this morning in (the Book of) *Acts*, 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, deliberate choice of terminology:

You know, not long after George "Dubya" Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq after 9/11, his biographer claims that he took a phone-call from Marine command in the "field," who warned him that the fight was proving difficult, but the president was in no mood for excuses:

"Kick ass", he replied.

"We must be tougher than hell..." he continued.

"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, it 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 sermon in today's text.

- because this is what the Scriptures reveal about God's agenda vis-a-vis sin:

that, *eventually*, He *will* "wipe it out";

that is to say, He will eliminate every vestige and trace of its "pollution" in His creation.

And the one commissioned to do this for Him is His Son, the Messiah; who Jesus claimed to be and now, *by His (multiple) resurrection appearances*, proves Himself to be.

The disciples, then, were thinking to themselves: "O. M. G. This, then, must be it. (Jesus' appearance in their midst.)

This must be "Judgment Day."

The "eschaton" - as theologians call it.

And so, thinking this, their "terror" was the "terror" of one anticipating that their "time-card was about to be punched."

Their 'terrified', in other words, was the right *and rational* 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]', right? (John 3:17.)

The "wiping out" has been postponed - *delayed*.

It is being held in check - like flood-waters behind a dam, said Jesus in *Luke 17: [v.26-27]*.

"Held in check" by the love of the Trinity for the *Second Coming* - when Jesus will

*return* from Heaven.

"Held in check" so that many men and women like us might be saved *before* it crashes down.

To us these facts are 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, and I quote, "open" 'their minds to understand' such things.

In that brief preceding prelude though, their hearts would have been beating "like crazy" in their chests.

And the question they'd have been asking themselves is:

"Is my life sooo(!) tied up with wrong-doing, sooo(!) compromised and perverse and worldly that I won't be elected for eternal life with the Savior?

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

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

This is a worrisome thought, isn't it?

And it should cause in us all *a mix* of emotion - as it did in the Apostles:

Which is why 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, had also, yes, seen them enduring an "avalanche" of taunts and criticism and even death threats.

But in that 'room' their dedication to this divisive, controversial miracle-worker was finally vindicated.

In that 'room' their personal sacrifices of time and wealth and discomfort

- the gamble of trusting in Him, of taking Him at His word - paid 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 to "hammer home" His risen reality: [\[Lk. 24:42\]](#).

"This is no illusion!" (That's His point.)

No hallucination.

And it's okay, I think He would also add, to not be certain of *every* detail of *every* doctrine.

It's okay, I think He would say to us, to have some questions *despite* Easter.

(Much will be forever excluded in mystery: [see, for example 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”! [\[1 Jn. 3:3\]](#)

Amen and alleluia!

#### 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.

**SON OF GOD**