

Easter 3, Year B
Luke 24: 36b-48
April 26, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Resurrection in Fits and Starts:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

The Gospels tell of many encounters with the risen Jesus—Jesus meeting Mary of Magdela outside the empty tomb; Jesus walking with Cleopas and his companion down the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus; Jesus breaking bread with his disciples; standing with them in a locked room; showing them his wounded hands and feet. When he meets them they are surprised, startled, terrified, frightened, filled with doubt and disbelief, and wonder and joy as well. Mary Magdalene mistakes him for a gardener. Cleopas and his companion don't even recognize him until he breaks and blesses bread. Others wonder if he is a ghost. Or maybe a collective hallucination. And who could blame them—Jesus was the last person on earth they expected to see standing in their midst, showing them his wounds, asking them for something to eat.

After all, they had seen him nailed to the cross. They had heard that awful cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” Some had followed as he was carried from the cross and buried in the tomb. They knew what had become of him. Weighted down with grief and despair, locked in from fear, they had forgotten what he told them. Forgotten his promise to return.

No wonder they were startled and terrified when they saw him standing there. No wonder they thought they were seeing a ghost. No wonder they were filled with doubt. It's hard to get your mind around such things. Hard to take in. Hard to grasp. Hard to believe. And yet....

And yet there he was. Standing there. Eating with them. Talking with them. Teaching them. Calling them into new life with him. Again and again and again.

That's the resurrection. That's Easter. Not a one-time-only affair but repeated encounters with the risen One. You see Easter doesn't happen all at once. It comes in fits and starts as we slowly begin to grasp that the One who promises to be with us until the end of the age is here with us now and will stay with us always. No matter what.

You see, Resurrection—the dawning of Christ rising in our lives—happens not once and not once for all—but all the time. It's a process, not an event. And it takes time for the Resurrection to sink in.

I know that. I know that from my life and I suspect some of you know that from your lives as well. Thirty years ago, I found myself in a bottom time. I was just getting through the day. I saw no way out. Then one snowy night, as I was backing the car out of the garage, in that pause that happens when you shift from reverse to drive, I was enveloped in silence and held in a warmth I had not before experienced. I heard the

words, “Behold the lamb of God.” And it was over. Except from that moment on, I knew that no matter what I would be ok. I was not alone.

I’d like to tell you that right away I knew that moment for what it was—a Resurrection moment. But that’s not what happened. It took years for me to begin to get my mind around that moment. It took years for me to trust the truth of that encounter with the living God. I stuffed it in the closet and slammed the door on it. I would have none of it. But Jesus would not let go of me. He kept knocking on that door.

Jesus coming to us is only half the story. We fill out the other half. Remember Jesus ends all those encounters with a commission. He instructs his disciples gathered in that room in Jerusalem to proclaim a call for repentance and a promise of forgiveness to all nations. To the disciples gathered on a mountain in Galilee, he says, “Go, make disciples of all nations.” And to Peter walking with him on the beach he says, “Tend my sheep. Feed my lambs.”

We, as individuals and as a community, are called to live into the Resurrection. We are called to tend God’s sheep, to feed God’s lambs, to work for God’s justice—making disciples in and through our lives. As we live into the Resurrection, making room for the risen Jesus in our lives—loving us, feeding us, challenging us, spurring us on and forgiving us when we fall short—we make our way in fits and starts to God’s great welcome table. That’s the way of it—the Resurrection way.