

**3 Easter April 15, 2018**  
**The Rev. Deborah Woolsey**

**Acceptance**  
**Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, OH**

Have you ever wondered why acceptance can be so very difficult? I have known friends and family members that were absolutely miserable people simply because they could not accept:

That they lost the job they helped create;  
Their granddaughter got engaged to someone from China;  
A decision they made turned out to be a poor one;  
Or that life, for whatever reason didn't go the way they had planned,  
anticipated, or wanted.

As a result of their inability to accept reality, these persons ended up growing angry and bitter and instead of strengthening relationships with family and friends, they grew more isolated, more lonely, and therefore more angry and more bitter and more sad, grieving a past they imagined for themselves that had never happened. In addition, they were never able to fully live in the moment, because the present reality did not match up with the life they had wanted.

It is very hard to be friends or be in relationship with someone who can only see what they want. You quickly run out of things to talk about, because they are not interested in new topics. They are stuck.

Yet, as their friend or family member, we might long to help the stuck person see and accept reality so you can face it together. As former Archbishop of South Africa Desmond Tutu has said, acceptance allows us to forgive and release the desire for a different past, so that real change can be made in the present.

Acceptance may be the thing the Risen Jesus had to convince his disciples of: that is, to help them accept his resurrection. That could be what happened in this morning's Gospel reading. At first glance today's reading may not seem much different from last Sunday's section of John's Gospel. It sounds much the same: Jesus appeared to his disciples, and they responded with fear and disbelief. Confusion even. They didn't seem to recognize Jesus.

We could easily get distracted by wondering about Jesus' resurrection body and what made it unrecognizable. Some scholars say this is because Jesus wasn't really there, his disciples were only remembering him, and by remembering it suddenly felt like he was there, even if he wasn't really. Not to disagree with scholars, but it seems like the authors of the Gospels were aware of such criticism when they wrote their gospels, and went to great lengths to show us a Risen Jesus who was among his disciples in body. This is an embodied Resurrected Jesus who with a great deal of patience showed his disciples he was real.

The Risen Jesus showed he was real by declaring peace as he suddenly appeared with his disciples. This detail is also in John's Gospel, and can be easy to overlook. But it's significant. Jesus didn't show up to scold his disciples, nor shame them, nor condemn them. Although he had reason to do so. Let's not forget none of the disciples in Luke's Gospel hung in there with Jesus at the crucifixion. Even throughout Jesus' ministry, several disciples just fought over who was the more important disciple instead of seeing what Jesus was really up to. Every disciple was guilty of some sin against Jesus, and maybe that is one reason why they had a hard time accepting a Risen Jesus. A Resurrected Jesus had reason to be disappointed, angry, or worse with those who followed him. A Resurrected Jesus could expose the disciples as failures, and he could come back seeking revenge.

But that isn't the way the Risen Jesus was. The first words the Risen Jesus spoke to his disciples were words of forgiveness, by wishing them peace.

Yet we heard that didn't convince them. They were afraid. They thought Jesus was a ghost. And still the Risen Jesus didn't condemn their fear. Instead he showed them his body, he was flesh and bones and real and right there.

And when that wasn't enough for the disciples to accept Jesus was risen, he asked for something to eat, and he ate. That's a hallmark of Luke's Gospel, recognizing the Risen Jesus when he broke bread at a meal with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and now with the simple act of eating fish. Which goes to show we followers of Jesus need to pay attention to meal times and the sharing of food: for the Risen Jesus may reveal himself in our breaking of bread.

That seemed to do it for the disciples, in eating the piece of fish they could recognize and accept what was in their midst:

The Risen Jesus;

The forgiveness and love of God;

And something more: the commission to leave wherever they were and share the same message of the Risen Jesus with the whole world: the need to repent, or turn from sin, from living for ourselves alone, from greed, from holding fiercely on to the past they wish had happened, or the way they wanted things to be;

And to proclaim forgiveness, which is God's gift to us all, if we accept it.

Maybe like the disciples, forgiveness might be difficult to accept. Maybe we've come to prefer our way to God's way, or maybe there is denial, or maybe we fear too much what accepting forgiveness from the Risen Jesus would mean for us: that we too would have to carry on that commission and proclaim there is more to life than what we want: there is a way to engage reality, even in a hurting, fear-filled world that gives strength, hope, and enables change: that there is the Resurrection of Jesus.

Yet again, Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminds us such acceptance is not resignation that things are the way they are and nothing can be done. Acceptance is the opposite of defeatism.

Acceptance is the beginning of joy. It is what allows us to engage life, to change what we can change, and make a difference. Acceptance is not forcing people to stay in abusive situations, acceptance shines the light of hope on other ways to live. Acceptance is not an escape from the storms of life, acceptance is what gives us what we need to head into the storm, and to come out the other side.

Accepting the Resurrection of Jesus is "not a fatalistic capitulation to the suffering and death of all things". Instead, as translator Mark Davis has written", the Resurrection of Jesus shows us the deep value of all life: whether it is the life of the earth, or of the community, even of our enemies, because the Risen Jesus shows us where there is life, there is God". Once we accept that, as Dorothy Sayers has written in her collection of essays titled *Letters to a Diminished Church*, we can recognize evil is no longer something God cannot transform.

The joyful truth of Easter is God loves us all so much, nothing can be used to keep us away from God, not even death. Accepting that truth may be challenging, but if that's how it is for you, take heart, Jesus' closest friends and followers had the same difficulty. Today's Gospel tells us doubt and even fear can be transformed to joyful acceptance, forgiveness, and peace, and for that, we can all say, Alleluia.