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St. Stephen's Episcopal Church – Edina, Minnesota
Virtual Celebration of the Holy Eucharist for
The Second Sunday in Easter; April 19, 2020

“Blessing Beyond The 516”

Scripture: John 20:19-31

Note: Aired to the St. Stephen's Church Youtube channel with a Virtual Service of Holy Communion 4.19.20.

516... the way I figure it. Give or take a few. That's about how many people we can infer from the Holy Scriptures saw Jesus after he was resurrected from the dead. About 516. And after that 516, that leaves, well... everybody else. Now, there must be a whole lot of blessing going on. Because Jesus says in John's gospel to at least eleven of those 516 people who saw him out and about after he left the tomb... “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” So not even counting all the people who have lived and died in the faith of Jesus since that fateful day a couple thousand years ago, there are a least 2.5 billion Christians around the world living right now and being blessed, because “...they have not seen, and yet they have come to believe.” *We...* have not seen, and yet we have come to believe. And so we are blessed.

And for that I am deeply grateful. Because these are some really trying times. I know life is rarely without its challenges, right?, and many people in this world have known extraordinary suffering, but this quarantine from community, this necessity of

separation for the sake of each other's health, these new rules that go so far as even to prevent some family members from being with loved ones when they are sick or dying, or that prevent friends from gathering for something so fundamental, so intimate as a funeral... oh, this can really distress the human spirit. Just last night I was in conversation with one of our members who is really feeling the stress of these times, and this person said to me, "What would we do without prayer? What do people do without faith?" Well, I suppose they make their way as best they can, but it has to be hard when you can't lean on the time-tested, time-trusted words like "*Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for though art with me...*" or Jesus' own words... "*Peace I leave with you; my own peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*"

But in times of such great uncertainty, is it any wonder that people might respond with fear, or with some degree of anger or anxiety or despondency?¹ Isn't it sort of natural that we might feel at one moment like locking our doors to keep the world out, and at the next moment throwing our doors open and demanding to be let back into the world? What do think those disciples were doing?... locked away in some house, afraid for their lives, because those who killed Jesus might just want to keep at it and kill them too. Certain that death waited for them outside, yet knowing

¹ Inspiration from Elisabeth Johnson from "Preach the Week" and gleaned from [Synthesis](#) for 4.19.2020.

no life awaited them stuck inside either. And it's into this moment that Jesus comes. No locked door stopping him. And with him comes a message of peace. Not "everything is okay." Not "everything is easy." Rather, *Peace... I am here. I am with you.* And no locked door could prevent that presence. No quarantine puts an end to that promise. We may well feel a sense of loss now, but we are not lost to the one who rises from the dead to be with us wherever we are. *Blessed are we who have not seen, and yet have come to believe.*

Now I gather most of us came to our faith through our parents, or some other family member, perhaps a close friend who somehow told us —and showed us— that Christ is alive. And perhaps they showed us that Christ is alive through their good works inspired by their faith, through their kindness and caring for others. Perhaps they showed us by holding onto hope and faith in Jesus through the hardest of times, through illness or tragedy, even until death. Perhaps they showed us by caring for us when others would not, by offering compassion and understanding when all else was fear and confusion. Perhaps they just told us the story of Jesus, took us to church Sunday by Sunday, and for Christmas and Easter and Pentecost, all those wondrous Holy Days that tell the story of his love for us. And every time that happened, every time it still happens, doesn't Jesus just keep showing up? Doesn't really matter the circumstances of the moment. Nothing really stops Jesus from

showing up. Jesus shows up when things are good, and when things are bad. When we are young and when we are old. When we are healthy or when we are infirm. When we feel strong in our faith and when we are not so very sure. When we are afraid or when we are elated. When we are together and when we are, for a time, apart.

There are times I surely wish I could make it 517... you know, 517 people who saw Jesus out and about after he left the tomb? Perhaps I could be #517 to see him “in the flesh”, so to speak. But then I remember, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”* And I think... That’s me! That’s a blessing for me. And that’s you! That is a blessing on all of us. The experience of Jesus’ resurrection is not reserved for a few hundred, though I am deeply grateful for their experience. Still, to believe in Jesus, to believe in the Risen Christ, is a blessing shared by many... for many, many more. The Spirit of Christ arisen is not bound by time or distance or circumstance or health or COVID... or party or race or gender, or anything else that we know, rather the risen Christ is seen in the faces and experiences and faith and hope of all those we encounter along this journey of life... Though we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, or though we walk the beautiful meadows in the brightness of life. And it is because of this that we can say in faith and in hope for

life and joy in Jesus' name... Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

Alleluia!