**Acts 4:32-37**

**32**All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. **33**With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. **34**There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales **35**and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

 **36**Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), **37**sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

### 1 John 1-2:5

### That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our joy complete.

 **5** This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

 **8** If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

 **1** My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **2** He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

 **3** We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. **4** Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. **5** But if anyone obeys his word, love for God**[**[**c**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1John+1:1-2:5#fen-NIV-30556c)**]** is truly made complete in them.

### John 20:19-31

19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

24Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

26A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

28Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

 “Grafted into the Eternal Word”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 7, 2024

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We *have* heard the good news of the Word of Life. We have heard the story of the resurrection of Jesus, and the good news that we are invited into new life in Christ when we follow him. We *have* had the light of God shone into and onto our lives. So, I hope that the couple of images I have been reflecting on this week will help us to understand even more clearly what this can mean to us day to day.

I wonder how many of you have visited the Fisher House and walked its grounds, its orchard. Last fall, we had fun helping to press cider after first chopping up apples and heard about some of the grafting that was done to early trees. I was reminded of a day when my kids were little and we visited a popular orchard near us in central Massachusetts. There was an apple tree with four different branches that had been grafted from four different kinds of apple trees. Inasmuch as I can’t remember the kinds of apples that are present in the orchard at the former parsonage, I certainly don’t remember what kinds of apples grew from that one trunk. This idea of one trunk and different branches came to mind this week as I chatted with the new priest at St. Francis Episcopal Church, Douglas, noting our liturgical differences. I thought later how we are grafted into Jesus, and also grafted into each other. We have at our root one thing; we have in our branches yet another, and yet this is what is visible. The church’s different *presentations* of the Body of Christ are one thing. How we live out our faith individually is even more manifold. It’s a choice we’ve made, and unlike the apple tree, it’s a choice we continually have to make in order for God’s fruit to be visible.

We see our own graftedness in this congregation in a couple of ways. We are the root of our faith, in Jesus himself and in what is sometimes called “apostolic succession,” which is to say we have the history of Jesus’ first followers to lean on. While we may not feel a need to choose between Peter and Paul, which is a long-standing division in the church, we can know that we owe a lot of our own faith to the traditions that have brought us to today. We are also, in some ways, a sum of our parts—some part early American church; some part first-century disciples, and some part each of you who bring to this Body something new and different. Our challenge is to embrace the new blossoming and new growth, and also to honor the roots we sometimes don’t see. I look forward to talking more about this at another time.

I’d like to suggest another kind of metaphorical way of looking at this, through the lens of biology rather than botany. I’m finally working again on a chapter of my book, in which I laugh at myself in that I used to say that I “don’t have an evangelical bone in my body.” No, I really did have them. I had Christian bones, even evangelical ones, and Christian tendons and ligaments and muscle. What I didn’t have was evangelical skin—maybe even sometimes, not Christian skin. So, I would like for us to think together about part of this. What do we have that is visible on the outside, representative of our faith.

What will this look like? Let it be our Christian self we put forward: Love, joy, peace in Christ. This chapter from the Acts of the Apostles makes very plain what it meant for Jesus’ first disciples. They lived in such a way that others were not in need. I hope that when we consider the needs of our community we will work very actively to meet them. I know for my part, there are choices I can make that will help to provide for others. I have patterns, generational patterns that I follow, which I may well have to undo in order to live simply that others may simply live. Doing so as the clearest proclamation of my trust in God’s provision may well speak more loudly to those who question the value of a Christian faith than any spoken word.

Just what does a life of faith in God who is capable of resurrection look like? Hope in the face of despair, because we know this is not the only moment we have, and that God who is greater than all things, can do all things—even bring to life that which is dead in our hearts and our lives.

This best self, this Christ-like self also means offering an uplifting word instead of one that denigrates; that brings down. There are plenty of people in this world who spend their time finding things to pick apart in other people. We are to be the people who raise others up. Beyond that, we can be the ones who look for goodness in others and see even their potential for goodness. We can be the ones who help to raise that goodness from the level of bone to skin.

What more does our Christian self look like? Well, it looks like loving honesty, when to tell the truth is always a choice. Deceit should not be in us. What we know to be true, and what we *mean* must be what we say. Our word should be more than golden; it should be a reflection of *the Word*, in whom we live and move and have our being. And while we’re on the subject of the Word, we can be the ones to make sure His name is never used as a curse—as just another epithet, but is held as the name of our Lord who saves us. While we’re at it, why curse at all? Let’s let our mouths be used to sing God’s praises, and not to mutter or outwardly utter anything profane.

What does living a life of faith look like? It looks like Optimism when the world cries “It can’t be done,” or “This is awful.” Folks, there is wonderful around the corner. That’s the nature of resurrection; of being grafted into the Eternal Word.

“6 If we claim to have fellowship with [God] and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

We live in a time and a place of temporary words; a time and a place of words of hate, of despair, of denigration and death. But this is not the only time, and these are not the only words. Jesus Christ, *our Lord*, who was risen from the dead invites us to hear a new story and to speak a new Word—his word.

Jesus invites us to follow Him, and to live into the light that somehow, like an X-ray maybe, shines into and onto the bones of our best selves and our best beliefs. In us, because God made us in the image of God, we have these most eternal things. We have goodness; we have purity; we have uplifting words for others and ourselves, and we have the hope that comes from knowing God can turn death into life eternal. What do you say, let’s wear it on our most visible surfaces.

By his death and resurrection, we are grafted into Jesus, who is the Eternal Word—the word that in the face of no says yes; in the face of negativity remains positive; in the face of the poverty of spirit and dishonesty says, “the truth is, there is something good in this world, and I have seen and known it.” That goodness—the light that shines into every corner of our lives, from the inside out, is God. May we feel it, may we know it, may we live it. Amen.