

Acts 3:12-19
I John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36b-48

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Easter 3B
April 15, 2018

As I read through today's Scriptures, I realized these were all about Identity Verification. In the Gospel story, the Disciples' doubt this Risen Christ is really who He says He is. What proof does Jesus give? In our Lesson from 1 John, we are warned about those who deceive, and reassured how we truly are children of God. Don't allow sin to rob you of this identity! In Acts, Peter describes the credentials of Jesus like a letter of reference in relationship to his audience, telling them: "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified His servant Jesus."

If you go on the internet with a computer, you can Google identity fraud and come up with all sorts of warnings and promotional offers. Identity Verification has become a necessary tool in today's complicated world. Too many people are well aware of stories of identity theft and fraud. For a price, you can learn all sorts of things about people's history in accessible public records throughout the U.S with a name and a state. This can help you determine whether or not you're dealing with someone genuine.

In December of 2011, some of you might have received an email with my name attached right before Christmas, claiming my wife & I were robbed at an airport in London, needing a quick loan from you to return home to the U.S. No ... I've never been to London; it was not from me. My email account had been hacked and my address list stolen. It was a scam. Like some of you, I've had my credit card compromised with charges I didn't make, and had to cancel an account, concerned about damage control in my financial credibility. My son, Matthew, has the misfortune of having the same name of another local man who has bought vehicles and borrowed money without making payments, starting ten years ago, and we still get letters, phone calls, and debt collectors at our door. It's hard to convince these creditors to leave us alone, even though the birth dates and social security numbers don't match. Identity fraud complicates life, causing mistrust in our relationships, compromising our reputation and sanity.

My wife, Diane, & I have a poignant memory concerning her mother a few days before her death. She was on heavy medication and suffering from dementia. Diane went to the nursing home to spend time with her one night, and Madge was convinced this was not her daughter.

Diane protested: "But I am Diane, Mom, who else would I be?" Madge stared back in anger, "You are not my daughter; you are an imposter!" It was a heartbreaking moment, even though Diane understood what was happening. Madge would recognize and welcome Diane in the next visit. Identity verification makes all the difference.

We celebrate the Easter news of the resurrected Jesus, filling our hearts and minds with hope and joy. But we're also human enough to question how this could be, and what it means for our lives. Is the presence of the risen Christ something we can experience now, and somehow heal us from all the wounds of sin in our lives?

The message of Easter is not something we're able to prove, in the regular sense, but is a spiritual reality which comes through faith. It is based on trust in God's word, and God's ability to meet us where we are.

Those first disciples were no longer sure of their own identities in the days after Jesus' crucifixion. They were spiritually wounded, their whole belief system in shambles, and they had become social outcasts. They huddled together behind locked doors, frightened of what the Romans and fellow Jews might do to them, afraid to be recognized, to be seen in public. These men had each denied knowing Jesus when confronted. Now they had to deal with their sense of shame and guilt for betrayal. They no longer felt a part of God's Kingdom, loathing themselves.

The news of resurrection did not convince these spiritually wounded men. They had seen the abuse of crucifixion inflict the mortal wounds of Jesus which took His life. So when Scriptures say these men were terrified to see Jesus appear in their midst in a locked room, I believe it. They thought they were being haunted. Surely the wrath of God would follow. Why would He wish them peace, after they had failed Him?

Jesus asked "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" Jesus tells them to look at His hands and feet. Why? To see His scars . . . a resurrected body which still shows the signs of His wounds. This was no imposter, but the real Jesus who they had seen crucified. This was no ghost, no mere apparition. Jesus said: "Touch Me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

These Disciples were dumbfounded, speechless, confused with disbelief. This was beyond their comprehension. Then Jesus said something most unexpected: "Have you anything here to eat?" What on earth could a heavenly spirit do with food? Whoever heard of a ghost or angel ever being hungry? But I guess this was the point when Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence. What a divine sense of humor God has!

It is strange when you think about it ... a physical spirit, recognizable by one's scars. Scars do make up a part of who we are. My physical scars are reminders of various events in my life . . . my toddler years when I got sliced open by a metal toy truck, cutting my finger with a wood saw as a kid, some teenage acne, a surgical scar. Your scars have stories with them, likely more interesting. People have other scars which show no physical signs. These carry far greater impact upon us, having wounded our emotions and spirit. We may try to hide these from public view, but those who know us best recognize our scars, even if they don't understand them. Scars can be interpreted as evidence of healing in our lives, with legacies of wisdom and compassion.

Jesus showed His scars to the disciples so they could recognize Him as the Risen Lord. Identity verification ... the healing power of God is revealed in our witness how Jesus is the wounded healer in our lives. You and I give hope and compassion to those who need reminders they too are God's children, proclaiming the healing power of Christ comes as resurrections in this life and in death. We believe in repentance and forgiveness because Jesus is alive in us. Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Amen.