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***“What Does My Apple Taste Like?”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur  
Season of Eastertide, Sunday, April 18, 2021  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

***Holy Scriptures: Luke 24: 36-48***

Luke 24: 36-48

***Jesus Appears to the Disciples***

<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.”

Sermon

***A God for All Seasons***

Our daughter Katie was in college in Kentucky  
when, on the day before Easter, she sent me a text, saying,  
“Dad, I have an Easter sermon title for you:  
‘Jesus Is Dead...Just Kidding!’”

***A God for All Seasons***

In this blessed season of Eastertide, the Sundays following the Resurrection of the Lord,  
we gather in the shadow of the Cross  
and dare to speak of new life.

We who are on a first-name basis with loss and grief  
know in our heart of hearts the hope of New Life in Christ.

We gather together to collect ourselves  
amidst the brokenness of our lives and communities and world,  
and boldly, bravely anticipate healing and wholeness.

We stand united – not uniform –  
even better, united in the diversity of our experiences of the holy  
to proclaim that there is One True God,  
a Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor,  
a God of Love, of Grace, of Glory,  
who resurrects us and renews us and redeems us  
again and again and again,

Here in the context of worship,  
while lifting up prayer and praise and proclamation,  
we bring to the forefront  
our innermost questions, our doubts, our wondering,  
our belief in . . .

### **. . . A God for All Seasons**

During the season of our congregation's annual Christmas Tree sale a few years ago,  
a new visitor from the neighborhood named Quinn  
dipped her toe in the pond that was First Christian Church of Decatur.  
She was just starting to visit the congregation,  
liking what she experienced,  
digging the energy and warm welcome and creativity.  
Having been burned badly in her past experiences with faith communities,  
she waited for the inevitable shoe to drop,  
for the truth to be revealed that we were inauthentic,  
that this church would hurt her like she had been hurt before.

One evening as Christmas Tree sale volunteers shared dinner in the Fellowship Hall,  
someone loosely affiliated with the church said,  
*"Only Christians can truly understand the meaning of Christmas."*

Well, Quinn thought, as I expected, the shoe just dropped.  
These folks are close-minded and high-minded,  
just like the pious, religious folks  
I don't want to have anything to do with.

Peggy was sitting near Quinn.  
She heard the comment,  
the comment that only Christians truly understand the meaning of Christmas.

*“As many people as there are,”* said Peggy,  
*“there are pathways to God.”*

In other words, the spirit-filled power of God's love is not limited to Christians.

*“As many people as there are, there are pathways to God.”*

The joy of God's gift of love to the world  
– whether at Christmas or Easter, summer vacation or winter solstice --  
the joy of God's love may be experienced by everyone the world over.  
The One True God of Big Love  
is too grand, too forgiving, too extravagant  
to be limited by any dogma or creed, denomination or religion.

Peggy, sitting at the table with church members and friends,  
breaking bread in a room scented with the aroma  
of pine needles, good soup, and healthy sweat, spoke her truth in love.  
Peggy gracefully, gently, wisely  
gave permission for the hearers of her words  
to be released from the constraints  
of too-long-held limitations of the concept  
that one's belief must be tied  
to a religious system established  
by someone else's experience of God.

True belief is not adherence or consent or acquiescence  
to what someone else believes or imagines or experiences.

True belief, authentic belief, reverent belief  
comes from the heart.

Belief comes from your heart, from you, from inside out, as an emergent gift of God.  
Belief comes from the faith each one of us is gifted by God,  
emerging from deep within,  
bubbling up and out and overflowing  
with joyful abundance and reckless abandon.

Belief flows through the soul and body and strength and mind,  
embodying every fiber of our being,  
in our cells and bones,  
in our intuitions, ideas and insights,  
giving strength, providing purpose,  
empowering you to stay connected to the Holy.

Quinn, hearing Peggy's gentle statement of faith,

receiving her belief that emanated from her heart, not from a coda,  
thought, maybe, just maybe, I found my tribe.

### ***A God for All Seasons***

Belief comes from the faith each one of us is gifted by God.

We have this faith

because God started it, created it, planted it  
in order to have a relationship with you.

God initiates the relationship,

starts the spark,

seeks you out,

knocks on the door,

demands you pay attention.

The light of Christ

shines into our souls through the cracks of our hardened lining.

The power of the Holy Spirit

reaches in, seeps in, grabs a hold and hugs us and never lets us go.

The Good News, my friends, is the Holy is experienced relationally.

God is a God of relationships,

continually seeking to have and to hold a loving relationship  
with creation, with humanity, with you.

As many people as there are on this blue planet spinning in the sky,

there are pathways to God,

pathways that are two-way streets,

flowing, growing, going from God to you and back again.

### ***A God for All Seasons***

One night a famous theologian professor

was speaking at a convention center filled with Christians from all over.

The professor spoke for more than two hours

challenging the resurrection of Jesus,

pointing out that there is no proof or evidence of a bodily resurrection.

After he finished his speech,

an old preacher slowly got up

and walked over to a microphone

set up for questions from the audience.

He took an apple out of a paper bag and started to eat it.

*“Now, Professor,” he said, “I haven’t read all the books you have.”*

Crunch, munch.

*“I haven’t travelled or talked or testified at the places you’ve been.”*

Crunch, munch.

*“But tell me this, Doctor. This here apple I’m eating, is it bitter or sweet?”*

*“I can’t answer the question,” said the professor,*

*“because I haven’t tasted the apple.”*

The old preacher took the last bite of apple, crunch, munch,  
dropped the core into his paper bag,  
looked up at the professor at the podium,  
and said, *“Neither have you tasted my Jesus.”*  
And the crowd went wild.

Every encounter with the holy is sacred, personal, unique.  
*“Neither have you tasted my Jesus.”*  
My experience of Jesus is not like yours, and yours will never be like mine.  
And my experience of Jesus is all the proof of the resurrection I am ever going to need.  
And that is simply, honestly, thankfully the way belief works.  
We see this in our daily lives,  
in our conversations with friends and family and our networks,  
and we witness this truth repeatedly in the Bible.  
The Holy Bible, again and again and again,  
repeatedly, gloriously, faithfully testifies with a theology that is relational.

Consider what we are invited to overhear  
in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles:

In Luke, after Jesus is crucified,  
the grieving Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James  
go to Jesus’ tomb,  
only to encounter two messengers in dazzling white  
who remind them that Jesus said on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day He would rise.

That same day two disciples are afraid for their lives,  
fleeing Jerusalem, headed to Emmaus,  
and while on the road out of town  
they meet a stranger who unpacks the Scriptures for them,  
and when they stop at an inn,  
He took bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them.

Their eyes were opened.  
He vanished,  
and they said, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us...”*

They returned to Jerusalem and told the eleven disciples  
how Jesus had made Himself known in the breaking of the bread.  
Suddenly Jesus appeared before the disciples.  
They were afraid.  
*Jesus showed them his hands and feet.*  
*And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement,*  
*he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”*  
*They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.*  
*He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you:*  
*Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me*  
*in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”*

Are you seeing a pattern?  
Grieving souls find solace when told of the resurrection.  
The fearful find calmness when Jesus feeds them body and soul.  
Thanks to an encounter with Christ,  
    the timid find new purpose,  
        the tempted get redirected,  
            the threatened are emboldened.

The story gets better, for this is the story of. . .

### ***A God for All Seasons***

In the book Acts of the Apostles,  
    which really could be entitled Acts of the Holy Spirit,  
        we meet Stephen,  
            who, just before he is stoned to death, sees the Risen Christ.

We meet Saul, "*breathing threats and murder against the disciples,*"  
    who hears the Risen Christ as he journeys to Damascus,  
        saying, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*"  
Saul is converted, changes his name to Paul,  
    and dedicates his life to loving God's people.

In Acts we hear the stories of Dorcas and Phillip, Lydia and Peter,  
    the same Peter who denied Jesus 3 times,  
        unsure how to relate to a Christ who wants to relate to him.  
Peter is now unsure who to include in Christ's fledgling Church.  
Peter has a vision once, twice, three times (see a pattern here?)  
    in which God says,  
        "*What God has cleansed you must not call common.*"  
And Peter gets it, grasping finally that  
    the Risen Christ appeared to him  
        to command the Church to show no partiality.

### ***A God for All Seasons***

There is a pattern here that sings like poetry pouring from our inner selves.  
*Amazing Grace* identifies the point and pattern and power of God's love in action.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind but now I see*

*Was Grace that taught my heart to fear  
And Grace, my fears relieved*

*How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed*

In Luke and Acts, the Risen Christ found those who were lost,  
opened the eyes of those who were blind,  
saved those who felt wretched and lowly.  
The Risen Christ relieved their fears and offered grace upon grace  
*“the hour I first believed”*

We see in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles  
so many glorious witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ  
from death into life and life everlasting,  
and we think to ourselves, *“I can relate.”*

Each story of an encounter of the resurrected Christ is unique.

No two are alike.

*“The hour I first believed”*

is unlike anyone else’s first hour, first experience, first taste of the apple.

Furthermore, all of our blessed spiritual ancestors were troubled,  
all were loved as they are in their broken places,  
all were offered comfort and mercy.

All discovered God’s grace is sufficient.

All had to tap into their own belief system, if you will.

So do you.

So do I.

We relate to these narratives

because we, too, have doubts, questions, and fears...fears Christ relieved.

*How precious did that Grace appear*

*The hour I first believed*

The Good News is

God gifts us with Belief that bubbles up and overflows from our hearts.

Belief emanating from the intelligence we bear in our minds,

Belief flowing through the strength we wield in our daring bodies,

Belief dancing in our souls that connect us to the holy and one another.

### ***A God for All Seasons***

With 61 years of living and breathing and loving,

including 36 years of pastoral ministry,

after having my corners honed by the whole people of God,

I deduce that I possess neither the power, the ability,

the personal gifts nor professional responsibility

to convince another living soul of the presence of God.

What I can do and share and be

is to set my compass on the Polar Star of Jesus Christ

whom I met when I was at my lowest, basest self,  
and who loves me into becoming a New Creation  
again, and again, and again.

*“I do not think our job is to argue disbelieving people  
into belief in resurrection,”* said William Willimon.

*“I think we have got to live lives of discipleship  
that make no sense if Jesus had not been raised from the dead.”*

*“There is no absolute, irrefutable, unassailable “proof” of resurrection.  
Even after the resurrection some of Jesus’ own disciples doubt.”*

*“Jesus does not trouble them or himself about their doubts. [Should we?]  
Rather Jesus turns to them and commands them:  
“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

Then Jesus loves us, redeems us, calls us,  
sends us out  
as his disciples to the far corners of the earth,  
not with arguments about the truth,  
not with proofs and evidence of a bodily resurrection,  
but rather as those whose presence, whose actions,  
whose love, whose speech, whose kindness and care,  
whose being and sharing of the Good News  
is the only “proof” of the resurrection.”<sup>[1]</sup>

How about them apples?

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

### Communion Invitation

Barbara Brown Taylor tells her story  
of her nephew Will’s first birthday party.  
The little boy was the center of everyone’s attention,  
and so he happily did a little dance –  
until a jealous seven-year-old named Jason charged over,  
put both of his hands on Will’s chest and shoved.  
Will fell hard.  
His rear end hit first, then his head, with a crack.  
He looked utterly surprised at first.  
No one had ever hurt him before, and he did not know what to make of it.



Then he opened up his mouth and he howled,  
but not for long.  
His mother hugged him, and she helped him to his feet,  
and the first thing Will did was to totter over to Jason.  
He knew Jason was at the bottom of this thing,  
but since such meanness was new to him he did not know what to do.  
So he did what he had always done.  
He put his arms around Jason and laid his head  
against that mean little boy's body.

*“What Will did to Jason put an end to the meanness in that room...”  
“This is what love is...  
not a warm feeling between two like-minded friends  
but plain old imitation of Christ,  
who took all the meanness of the world  
and ran it through the filter of his own body,  
repaying evil for good, blame with pardon, death with life.  
Call it a divine reverse psychology.  
[Love] worked once, and it can work again,  
whenever God can find someone else willing to give it a try.”*

Christ's death on the cross shows the intense love of God for creation.  
God's purpose is to move, stir, empower people into action.  
What if the purpose of Jesus Christ's death on the Cross  
is to influence humankind toward moral improvement,  
to be good in the human context,  
to be a light to the nations?

Sharon Baker ponders on this.

*“God sent Jesus to demonstrate God's love  
and to give us an example of how we should live.  
Jesus served as a perfect example by fully revealing God's love to us.  
By dying on the cross,  
Jesus demonstrated the extravagance of divine grace  
and the lengths to which God will go...to redeem us...”* <sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> William H. Willimon, Pulpit Resource, Vol. 39. No. 2. P. 24. Portions adapted for this sermon.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Sharon L. Baker, Executing God: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about Salvation and the Cross, Page 60.  
“We sinned and separated ourselves from God's love. Because of sin, we lost sight of how to live according to God's will. But God sent Jesus to demonstrate God's love and to give us an example of how we should live. Jesus served as a perfect example by fully revealing God's love to us. By dying on the cross, Jesus demonstrated the extravagance of divine grace and the lengths to which God will go...to redeem us... When we look upon the cross of Christ and see God's incredible love for us, we desire union with that love. Our desire acts as an invitation to the Holy Spirit who then infuses us, fills us, and empowers us. Through the Holy Spirit, God pours the divine love into our hearts (Romans 5:5) and by doing so, justifies us and saves us by forgiving our sin. Because of the power of God's Spirit, we then live our redeemed lives in imitation of God's love as revealed in Jesus.”