

If we were to select a theme capturing the message of Easter and these Easter Sundays leading to its climactic conclusion at Pentecost, I would suggest: “Endings as Beginnings.”

Today’s Gospel begins with the end of the story of the encounter between the Risen Jesus, and the disciples Cleopas and his unnamed companion on the road from Jerusalem at the supper at the inn in Emmaus. Again the Risen Jesus appears to the eleven disciples huddled together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Like St. John’s account we heard last Sunday, St. Luke likewise emphasizes the physicality of the Risen Jesus, “Look at my hands and feet, that it is I myself.” The invitation addressed only to the apostle Thomas last week is now addressed to the whole group: “Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.” And then he adds, “Have you anything here to eat?” Following which the disciples give him a piece of baked fish which he promptly consumes. Once more recognition of the Risen Jesus comes from encountering him in the midst of the disciples gathered together in community, bearing his wounds, and to whom he speaks his word in the context of sharing a meal. This is what we continue to experience every time we gather in the Eucharist. Today’s gospel, while it describes an encounter with Jesus after his purely earthly life ended, presents us with the beginning of his continuing presence and work through the church, his disciples then, and us, now.

Clarence Jordan a farmer and New Testament Greek scholar who was the founder of Koinonia Farm, a small but influential religious community in southwest Georgia and also instrumental in founding Habitat for Humanity, wrote several works including “The Cotton Patch Gospel.” In one of his sermons Jordan states: “The resurrection places Jesus on *this* side of the grave—here and now—in the midst of this life. He is not standing on the shore of eternity beckoning us to join him there. He is standing beside us, strengthening us in this life. The good news of the resurrection of Jesus is not that we shall die and go home with him, but that he has risen and comes home with us, bringing all his hungry, naked, thirsty,

sick, prisoner brothers and sisters with him”— appears to us in our own and the wounds of our brothers and sisters as we contemplated last weekend.

Like the disciples of Emmaus and the eleven gathered in the Upper Room at table, at the end of every Eucharist we are sent forth to be the presence of the Risen Jesus in the world. The Risen Jesus walks among us in “flesh and bone”—our flesh and bone: he is our family and friends who offer their love to us and receive the love we yearn to give; he is the poor and troubled who challenge us to imitate his compassion and servanthood. In calling us to be “witnesses” of his resurrection Jesus asks us to live his Gospel of peace and reconciliation in the context of our daily lives, in the complexities of our workplaces, in the struggle to realize our hopes and dreams for ourselves and our families, in our advocacy for the voiceless in our society and world, in outreach to those who live at the peripheries of life-- experiencing the love of God of which the author of 1 John in the second reading speaks, being “truly perfected”—completed—in us. This is what being converted to Jesus as spoken about by the apostle Peter in today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles consists. It’s the ending of a former way of living and being and the embracing a new beginning—life in Christ, not in some philosophical system of thought, but physically in our body, and yes, in and through our wounds.

To quote Clarence Jordan once again: “On the morning of the resurrection, God put life in the present tense, not in the future. He gave us not a promise but a presence. Not a hope for the future but power for the present. Not so much the assurance that we shall live someday but that he is risen today. ...The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship. Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church.”

Endings as beginnings.