



Easter 3 (B)

Legacy

RCL: Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“What legacy do you want to leave behind?”

This question is often asked by reporters when interviewing individuals who have played a pivotal role in society. Think of an interview with the likes of a tech giant like Bill Gates; a religious leader like Desmond Tutu; or a former president or world leader. In a one-on-one interview, the question of legacy will inevitably come up. Those whose lives have impacted society at large are forced to think of their legacy, hopefully not in self-aggrandizing ways, but as a continuation of the good produced by their lives' work. It's a question they have probably pondered many times before, especially as they approach the end of their career, and even more, as they approach the end of their life.

While no interviewer ever asked Jesus what legacy he wanted to leave behind, the question of legacy — what Jesus sought to leave behind — is an important theme in Jesus' post-resurrection accounts. Jesus does not seem concerned with what the masses will have to say about him — rather, Jesus is concerned with what his disciples will know and believe, and what they will do in his name.

In today's gospel, we encounter Jesus with his disciples one last time. This is the last time Jesus will share his peace with the disciples; this is the last time the disciples will be able to see and touch Jesus' body; and this is the last time Jesus and the disciples will share a meal. After this, Jesus will lead his disciples to Bethany, where he will be lifted up and seated at the right hand of the Father.

But before their sojourn, Jesus addresses his disciples and presents them with a final testimony. Jesus tells his disciples that everything written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms has been fulfilled by his passion, death, and resurrection. And now that God's word has been fulfilled, true repentance and forgiveness can finally be proclaimed to all people.

Jesus' legacy is his passion, death, and resurrection, and it has fulfilled everything promised in Holy Scripture. Through these acts, God in Christ has opened salvation to all nations, expanding God's word

through the Word made flesh beyond the people of Israel. But Jesus does not simply leave behind a legacy – a long list of accomplishments and accolades – but a covenant – an eternal and limitless promise.

While legacies are concerned with how an individual's past achievements continue to have an echoing effect, covenants are a binding agreement, a pledge that continues to have a tangible effect. Jesus' covenant is not a brief note in a score, but the final movement that captures the whole work. It is through this covenant that all of humanity is able to hear the sweet sounds of salvation.

Jesus has drafted his new and indissoluble covenant with his blood and implemented it once and for all by his dying and rising. In this, he not only makes his covenant eternal and binding but he also makes us benefactors in perpetuity of his work on the cross and in the empty tomb.

This new covenant has not supplanted God's previous covenants, nor even eliminated them, rather, through Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, God's promise is made attainable to all people regardless of status, class, race, or all other categories designed to separate and fracture the human family of God. This new covenant fulfills and expands God's covenant to Abraham and renews the hope and promise of the prophets and psalmist. God's covenant, God's word, has been completed by the Word of God, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

So, what does this covenant demand of us?

We receive some wisdom if we look closely at what the risen Jesus does when he appears to his disciples. While this may be the last time that Jesus is able to intimately share with his disciples, we know from all other post-resurrection appearances that this is not the first time that Jesus has offered his peace, or that the disciples have seen and touched his risen body, or that he has shared a meal with them. The risen Jesus ingrains into the hearts and minds of his disciples a sacred rite, a holy pattern to encounter him. From the empty tomb to the angelic vision to the encounter at Emmaus to Saint Peter's experience, the risen Jesus over and over again opens the minds and hearts of the disciples. He does this not by force or even by displaying the greatness of his resurrection – remember that the disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus at first glance – but instead opens their minds and hearts by continuing to share all of himself: his peace, his body, and flesh.

Jesus opens the minds of his disciples not only so that they can understand the scriptures and grasp who Jesus really is, but also so that they may continue to follow in his way of love once he departs this earth. If we want to fulfill our end of Jesus' eternal covenant, we need to partake in that which the risen Jesus did himself: offer his peace, make his body known, and share in the sacred meal.

The primary way the Church is invited to emulate the risen Jesus and join, share, and proclaim Jesus' covenant is in the celebration of the sacred mysteries, the holy sacrifice of the mass. That which, in the words of Dom Gregory Dix, "Week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the [people] have done."

In the primordial act of taking bread and wine, blessing, breaking, and sharing, we participate in Jesus' covenant. It is through this act that we encounter over and over again the risen Jesus. It is through this act that we receive his peace, touch and behold his body, and share a meal with him. The good news is that this sacred pattern did not come to an end when Jesus ascended into heaven – instead, it spread to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Rev. Carlos de la Torre is the rector of Saint John's Episcopal Church in Bellafonte, Pennsylvania.