

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter: Holy Trinity Church: April 18, 2021**

**Luke 24:36-48: *They will be waiting for you in Heaven!***

**Preached**

**By**

**The Rev. John E. Higginbotham+**

**In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**

**Tolstoy once told a story of a Czar and Czarina who wished to honor the members of their court with a banquet. They sent out invitations and requested that the guests come with the invitations in their hands. When they arrived at the banquet the guests were surprised to discover that the guards did not look at their invitations at all. Instead they examined their hands. The guests wondered about this, but they were also curious to see who the Czar and Czarina would choose as the guest of honor to sit between them at the banquet. They were flabbergasted to see that it was the old scrub woman who had worked to keep the palace clean for years. The guards, having examined her hands, declared, "You have the proper credentials to be the guest of honor. We can see your love and loyalty in your hands."**

After his crucifixion, the disciples of Jesus were trying to sort out the meaning of the reports they had been receiving about appearances of the risen Christ. It was most confusing to them. Was it a hoax? They were not completely immune to superstition. Perhaps it was a ghost. Suddenly it happened. Jesus himself stood among them. The disciples were startled and frightened. Then Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled and why do questions arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet. It is I, myself..." The response of the disciples is a sermon. Luke tells us that they "disbelieved for joy..." It was simply too wonderful to be true. Jesus was alive, and he was with them right there. No wonder they had difficulty believing. Some people still have that problem today. Many desperately want to believe but something holds them back. "See my hands and my feet.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, I preach Christ crucified because that is the only way to our resurrection. Christ died for us, so we too die to sin, and we will rise in Heaven where we will see Jesus and our loved ones will be waiting for us. It boggles our minds, because it is so difficult to believe God cares that much about all of us. In the first place, some of us are more comfortable with an impersonal God who is the First Cause, the Unmoved Mover, Light from Light, Source of Life and power but not of personality. The idea of God with

**nail prints in his hands and feet because of his great love for us is an idea we are not ready for.**

**Some years ago, the newspapers were full of a story about the death of seventy-eight people in New Delhi, India. There had been a bus accident and, in the bus, had been two castes of Indians. A man tied a rope to a tree, and all eleven "untouchables" climbed out to safety. But seventy-eight Indians died because they would not use the same rope that had been touched and used by the "untouchables." How outrageous are the claims of the Gospel? The Divine Creator of all that lives and moves and has its being, came down to earth and suffered and died to say to us that no one on this earth is untouchable. No one is beyond God's great love and concern for all of us.**

**There is a beautiful story about the courtship of Moses Mendelssohn, the grandfather of the great German composer. Moses Mendelssohn was a small man with a misshapen, humped back. One day he visited a merchant in Hamburg who had a lovely daughter. Though Mendelssohn admired her greatly, she avoided him, seemingly afraid of his grotesque hump.**

**On the last day of his visit he went to tell her goodbye. Her face seemed to beam with beauty but when he entered, she cast her eyes to the floor.**

**Mendelssohn's heart ached for her. After some small talk, he slowly drew to**

the subject that filled his mind. "Do you believe that marriages are made in Heaven?" he asked. "Yes," replied the young woman. "And do you?"

"Of course," Mendelssohn answered. "I believe that at the birth of each child, the Lord says, 'That boy shall marry that girl.' But in my case, the Lord also added, 'But alas, his wife will have a terrible hump.' "At that moment, I called, 'Oh Lord, that would be a tragedy for her. Please give me the humped back and let her be beautiful.'" We are told that the young woman was so moved by these words that she reached for Mendelssohn's hand and later became his loving and faithful wife.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, in trying to deal with the meaning of the cross on which Christ died, the early church came to understand that those nail prints in the hands and feet of Jesus should have been ours. But God so loved the world that he sent his own Son to bear the burden brought about by the iniquity of us all. Can you deal with that? Can you believe that God really cares about you, all of you, that much? Indeed, it is difficult to believe life goes on beyond the tomb.

In the second place, there are others of us who have difficulty believing that life really goes on beyond the tomb. It simply is too wonderful to believe that there is a world beyond this world and another existence in which that dies

**here is resurrected to new life in that place we call Heaven. Yet such a conviction is at the very heart of our faith.**

**The world simply cannot deal with that kind of expectation. Without our Easter faith, not only death but life itself is ultimately meaningless. What value is there in love that ends beside a grave?**

**All the nonbelieving world can do with death is to ridicule it, deny it, and avoid talking about it. But not those who have seen the hands and feet of the risen Savior. He is alive and because he lives so shall we live! We truly have trouble processing the implications of these truths. It just boggles our minds. Stop having troubles! Connect your mind with your heart, your Holy Spirit. Because He lives, so shall we live into eternity.**

**Many people cannot believe God really loves them that much. Many cannot believe that life really does go on beyond the grave. Even more significantly, most people do not want to deal with the implications of those two truths. So, what does it mean, if there really is a God who is that intimately concerned about our lives? So, what does it mean if this life really is but a prelude to everlasting life? Yes indeed, my dearest brothers and sisters!**

**Most of you know that my father went home to the Lord about three years ago. He had a long bout of cancer and he suffered much. Dad was a deeply**

religious man. I received my faith on his knee as a very young boy. I loved talking with Dad. He called it, 'shooting the breeze.' He loved to talk with me about God and Jesus Christ, the Roman Catholic Church, the priesthood, John Kennedy and, of course, the Boston Red Sox. A couple of days before he died, we were shooting the breeze sitting on his death bed. When we were finished 'shooting the breeze,' he said, "I'm tired, Johnny. Just remember, I will be waiting for you in Heaven." I miss my father very much, but he left me and my mother and my entire family with that wonderful faith filled gift, "I will be waiting for you in Heaven." Isn't that a wonderful gift knowing we will be waiting for each other in Heaven. It has comforted me immensely since Dad went home to the Lord and I hope you embrace it and pass that gift on to your loved ones. When you get close to death, and the veil between Heaven and earth grows thin, tell them, "I love you and I will be waiting for you in Heaven!

The same kind of thing happened in the lives of those first disciples. From frightened and uncertain men marked by doubt and envy, they became apostles of great courage and self-giving. So, how about you, my sisters and brothers? What difference has been made in your life by seeing the hands and feet of the risen Christ? Has it caused you to take more seriously your walk with the Man of Galilee? Has it had some effect on the goals you have set for

**your life? After all, if life is indeed eternal, some of our goals are going to seem awfully shortsighted and self-serving, are they not?**

**Rabbi Harold Kushner tells about a young man who left home to find fame and fortune in Hollywood. He had three dreams when he set out: First dream, to see his name in lights. Second dream, to own a Rolls Royce, and third to marry a gorgeous actress. By the time he was thirty, he had done all three, and he was a deeply depressed young man, unable to work creatively anymore despite, the fact that all his dreams had come true. By thirty, he had run out of goals. What was there for him to do with the rest of his life? Those who have seen the hands and feet of the risen Christ and live their lives in the light of eternity never run out of a purposeful life. "See my hands and my feet." God really does love us that much. Life really does go on beyond the tomb. Here is the challenge my sisters and brothers, what is your response to those two great truths? Jesus is saying to you this morning, "I will be waiting for you in Heaven, whenever it is your time." AMEN!**