

By Rev. Caro Hall; St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Atascadero, CA

20/20 hindsight is a delightful thing. It means that we’re a step ahead of the disciples in today’s Gospel reading. We can say with Peter “You are the Messiah.” And we know a lot more about what that means than Peter did.

As you know, at the time the Holy Land was occupied by the Romans, and many of the Jews, Peter included, imagined that the Messiah would come and throw out the Romans, restoring Israel to an independent nation once again. It’s ironic to think that today many Palestinians would love a similar savior to deliver them from the onslaughts of the Israeli forces.

Back then, the longed for Messiah would become the just and powerful ruler of the land and everything that was best about being Jewish in Israel would be restored. But of course, as we know with our 20/20 hindsight – that’s not at all the kind of Messiah that Jesus was. Which maybe why he told his disciples not to tell anyone else that he was the Messiah.

And then he goes on to tell them the kind of Messiah he is. “he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly.”

I’m not surprised that Peter was shocked and began to reprimand him. That was not what they expected. That was negative thinking. Jesus should be imagining victory and hope, not talking about being killed. But not only does Jesus talk about experiencing great suffering, he turns to the crowd and says that anyone who follows him must expect the same thing.

Often, we turn that around and we think that any time we experience pain, failure, disappointment or just the grief of aging, we must be doing

something wrong, or must have done something wrong. But Jesus is very clear that his followers, all of us who are enrolled in the reign of God, must expect suffering. It's part of the deal. I don't think we need to get carried away and seek out suffering in order to think that God is blessing us. But Jesus is very clear that when we follow him, we get to give our lives away, not hang on to them.

I have enjoyed meeting your new priest. Linzi, this week. She's charismatic, gifted, younger than many of us and y'all have waited so very long for God to send you a pastor, priest and prophet. Linzi is an answer to prayer.

But she is not the Messiah.

St. Luke's still gets to be a disciple of Jesus, not just as individuals but as a body, as the particular expression of the Body of Christ in this place and at this time. God is still calling you to take up your cross and follow him.

Just as the Jewish people of Jesus' time were looking for a messiah to save them, so we tend to look for things or people to save us. I confess that I am always looking for a new diet or a new drug or a special plant that will save me from my tendency to put on weight and that will help to keep my energy up and my motivation high. Right now as a country, we are looking for a savior, a president who will solve all our social and financial problems, bring world peace and prevent climate change. We look and hope for something or someone who will solve the many problems we experience and see others experiencing.

But Jesus does not offer any kind of short-term fix. He isn't seeing things in the very human way we tend to. What kind of a solution is it to allow himself to be killed? But to be raised again, that is something quite new. Not raised again exactly as he was before, but in a new way. We

know that at first the disciples didn't recognize him in his post-Resurrection body. He was recognizably the same but also completely changed.

And that is also true for us as disciples. As we allow the Spirit of God to transform us, as we let go of all our precious ideas and preconceived notions and allow God to work in and through our lives we too are completely changed and yet recognizably ourselves.

And that is the process that St Luke's is going through. Over the years you are completely changed and yet recognizably the same. Physically the worship space is transformed, and you the people are different, and yet St Luke's is still recognizable.

And that process of giving up your lives - of giving up who St Luke's is, in order to become who St Luke's truly is in God's eyes is ongoing.

Linzi is part of that process. She is here to help you grow just as you help her grow, closer and closer to the Christ-like beings we were all intended to be, closer and closer to a true manifestation of the Body of Christ in this place.

Many of you have hung in and fought despair and frustration to keep St. Lukes going. And you have succeeded. Thank you.

So, looking at the Gospel reading today and asking what God would say to us at this time I think there are two challenges: 1) who do we say that Jesus is? And 2) if we want to follow Jesus we need to deny ourselves – we need to see things from a heavenly perspective not a human one.

Some of you may know a hymn I learned as a child, the opening words go "I serve a risen Savior he's in the world today". Is that who Jesus is to you? If we serve a risen Savior who's in the world today then let's talk

about him and let us celebrate where and when we see him,. The reading from James was all about how powerful our words can be. Talking about Jesus, God, Spirit – whatever language you use – is powerful. When we talk about our God moments they increase. As we talk about God together it gives us language and courage to talk about God with others and we experience the presence of God more powerfully.

And that makes it easier to trust when we are called to see things from a spiritual perspective and to let go of things that we cherish, things that have been meaningful to us, things we have hoped would save us or imagined were saving us. No person, no priest or president however wonderful, no program or quick fix is the messiah.

We are called my friends, to be willing to let go and to depend entirely on the “Risen Savior who’s in the world today.” And in doing so, we find new life.

May God bless us all with new life in him. Amen.