



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — April 28, 2021

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From Bishop Hughes

What blessings will you carry forward?

This is a transcript from a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. It is Eastertide and we are in the midst of Spring. And finally we are at that place where vaccines seem to be readily available all across our state. Where you could wake up on Monday, decide you want to get vaccinated, probably get an appointment in the next day or two. That is such a change for us and that change lets us know that, at least for now, right here and in this place --it's not in this way the whole world over, but for right now, right here in this place -- it's entirely possible that we've entered the ending phase of pandemic.

Notice I said phase. It's not as if that there's a switch that we can flip on or off and then suddenly there will be no more pandemic. It will go on for weeks and months, maybe into the next year before we reach a place where we realize, "Oh, we think that is part of our past now." But we're in that ending phase.

And I think it's important for us right now, especially in Eastertide, at a time when we talk about transformation and how much resurrection has changed us and changed who we are in relationship with God. But to talk about the transformation that God has done with, for and to us during this time of pandemic. Many of us, even when we've had to hold tragedy and blessing

together during this time, have recognized that there has been goodness that God has placed in our life and that goodness is very often people and not things. We have come to cherish people in a way that we did not before, it's been a reawakening of relationships, a reawakening of the kind of time that we give to relationships and the goodness that comes from giving that time to relationships. Whether it's with a spouse or an old friend, a parent, a child or the neighbor next door, we have come to see the importance of being in relationship with other people and how much that blesses us and how much that blesses them and blesses the entire community around us.

And so, as we head into another phase where things will be more active... we might, some of us, may be heading back to the office, some of us will be heading into school, some of us may be going to more gatherings, our churches will be doing more gatherings. As we head into that time, what is it that we want to hold onto? I am reminded of Isaiah, saying to the Nation of Israel in Chapter 43 that God had done former things with them and they shouldn't be looking to the former things anymore, they should look to the new things that God was doing for them. God has done new things with us in this time – how do we want to take those new things forward with us?

I think of it like this: many of us are having dinner with the same people in our families or in our households seven days a week. Chances are we're not going to be doing that going forward. But something wonderful came from that closeness so

how do we need to think of it going forward? How many nights a week do we want to make sure we have dinner? How many times a day do we want to make sure we check in with each other? How often do we want to plan to see our friends? How will we continue to cherish those good things that God has given us in this time?

One thing is sure: that wherever pandemic takes us next in this winding down (we hope and pray that that is the time that we're entering), wherever it takes us next, God continues to go with us, God continues to bless us and continues to change us and give us good things for us to cherish. The choice is ours about how we take those things forward with us into the rest of our lives.

Sermon for Easter III (April 18, 2021)

This is a transcript from a video message.

One of the gifts of our tradition is we order our lives around a liturgical calendar. And the blessing of the liturgical calendar, especially at this time that we live in ... a time where we're very much focused on a particular event, we maybe anticipate that event, we fully celebrate that event -- whether it's a birthday or an anniversary or the start of school or graduation. We completely enjoy it when it happens and then the minute it is over, we start planning for the next event. And so it is a gift, and I would go so far as to say it's a kindness to us, that in our tradition -- because of the liturgical calendar -- we live our life in seasons.

And so we prepare for an event like Easter, we spend time getting ourselves ready for an event, and then we spend 50 days in Eastertide. We call them sometimes "The Great 50 Days", those 50 days from Easter (that first Sunday) all the way through Pentecost (the last Sunday of those 50 days). There was a time in the ancient church where those 50 days were devoted to formation for those who had just recently been baptized. They had gone through a catechumenate (a time of study and preparation) but there was an acknowledgement by the church that even with

that study, they needed to learn how to actually be fully in the community of the faithful and that would take even more time beyond that preparatory time.

And over time, we have been given that the opportunity (through the selections that are selected during Eastertide) to focus, to do our own learning, to help us think about resurrection. And you'll notice each week, as we look at the passages, that it helps us to think more about resurrection. It also helps us to think about the ancient church and the ways that they were formed and what their struggles were and how they learned and how they grew. And it helps us wonder and compare and reflect in ourselves in what way are we learning, in what way are we being challenged, in what way are we growing as we learn more and more about resurrection.

Because the thing for us as Christians - the thing that changes everything -- is resurrection. That Jesus, who in that way that we will never fully comprehend, who incarnated, is fully human and fully divine -- Jesus that was the incarnation of God on this planet, walking with us. Jesus who understood sorrow and pain in tangible, physical ways. Jesus who celebrated amongst disciples and friends and family. Jesus who understood in a very particular way what it was to be like us -- took that understanding even further by dying. And then did something that defies all logic, that defies all science, that defies physics. That defies anything that we could describe it with, could only be miraculous and could only be an act of God: Jesus came back from the dead and in that resurrection, everything changed. Everything changed for God and everything changed for us. We would forever be connected to God in a very special and particular way through Jesus Christ. And that is the change that, when we turn to Jesus, we are turning to God. That Jesus in some way is always with us. That we're never wandering the planet on our own, trying to find God. But God is always available,

trying to find us. And that we turn to God -- it is worthwhile for us to think about resurrection.

And I love these passages that we've looked at over the last two weeks. I invite you to go back to Chapter 20 and John -- stick with Chapter 24 -- and Luke. If we're right, it's towards the end of the passage. But read that entire Chapter again throughout this week. It's helpful to hold the two up to each other; it's also helpful to do the same with Mark and with Matthew. And to recognize there's a variety of ways that people experience resurrection.

We've been hearing about them the last two Sundays -- we heard about it on Easter, we heard it about it last Sunday (the second week of Easter) -- specifically from John's gospel, with Mary weeping outside the tomb, running to tell the disciples that there was no one there. What could be wrong? The disciples running back, Peter and the disciple that Jesus loved, running back. One of them immediately understanding what happened, immediately remembering those words that Jesus said: he would come back after three days. The other one just scratching his head, not knowing what's happening. And Mary continuing to sob, even when that man stood there (the man that she thought was the gardener), even as he stood there and she was explaining why she was so upset. It was not until she heard her name called, when she heard her name called then she recognized Jesus.

We see him go from there to being in the groups of disciples, revealing himself to them. They want again to know more about what is happening. Thomas isn't there. When they try and tell Thomas, Thomas says, "There's just simply no way, I have to see it for myself." And Jesus kindly reveals himself -- "Put your hands, touch, go ahead." and then also says, "There will be those who come in the future that will not see me in this way and they will believe and how blessed they will be."

Jesus talking about who would come after the disciples, including us -- all those generations of

people that have believed without having the physical manifestation of God's incarnate self in front of us. All those many ways that people saw resurrection here in this passage today, the many ways.

And you've got to go back and read the first part of this chapter because that's the road to Emmaus. How do we even talk about the ways that people see resurrection without talking about Emmaus. That Jesus is walking along with the disciples, walking alongside them. They're having a whole conversation; they're telling him all about his own ministry and his own death and how bereft they are and how sorrowful they are. And as they're about to turn off one way and he's about to turn off another way, they say, "Why don't you just stay with us? It'll be safer; you stay with us and in the morning, you can go on your merry way." It is not until he sits with them, breaks bread together with them, and eats with them that they recognize who he is. And then he opens something in their hearts and minds and spirit so they are able to understand scripture in a way they could not before. If they had been able to understand it before, they would know who had been walking with them all of that day.

And then here he appears in that room. Those same disciples have scurried themselves back to Jerusalem. He appears in that room. That's all they're talking about and when they see him, the first thing they see, they THINK they're seeing, is a ghost. We're not even sure, if we imagine the scene, that they think it was a ghost of him or ghost of somebody else. What they were: just frightened period. And he reveals himself in these words, "Peace be with you."

"Peace be with you." And that peace, that sense of knowing that you are standing in the presence of Christ -- it's a very different peace than the kind of peace that I think so often we seek when we seek peace. We're seeking security, we're seeking to know that things are going to be exactly the way we want them to be. We feel peaceful when we

know that we are in control and no one can rock the plans that we have in place. We feel peaceful when everyone agrees with us and there is no discord and there's no conflict. That's when we feel peace. Jesus means a peace that is completely different. And all of that that's disruptive and chaotic may continue on around us but when Jesus says, "Peace be with you." to those disciples and "Peace be with you." to us, it is the peace that comes when we know we are in the presence of the resurrected Jesus. That we are in the presence of something that is powerful, beyond our ability to understand or comprehend but that we can know it even if we do not have a deep understanding of it. That we can see it, that we can see in our own eyes, hear with our own ears, know in our own spirits the presence of Jesus Christ -- in each other and in the people around us and in the words of scripture that we read. That there is Jesus in all of those things.

"Peace be with you." It's a different kind of peace. It's a completely different kind of peace than the peace of control and the peace of security that we have put in place ourselves. This peace that comes from the knowledge of who Jesus is. And it's the peace that we see happening in that incredible variety of ways.

When he stands there and says, "Peace be with you.", he also starts talking to them about scripture and again opens their minds. They have this understanding of scripture that they never had before. If they had understood it, they would have recognized him, they would have understood what was happening around them. But they did not. It is God's gift that allows them, it is God's gift that allows us, to have a deeper understanding of scripture and a deeper understanding of what God is trying to do around us and in us and through us.

He goes on and asks for food. It's amazing how much the resurrected Jesus eats in these stories! We see him eating all the time, reminding us that we are looking at the miraculous -- that that is a human body in some way that can eat and use

food and dispose of food. That is a human body that is also divine, that came back and that appears and then walks away and disappears. That holds the wounds and the scars so that they can be seen but also has the power to be with people in such a way of peace and knowledge and understanding that they come closer to God than they ever have before.

This is such a blessing for us, these stories are such a blessing for us. The reason I keep telling people, "Read them all through the week" is so we have a better understanding of what we've been going through over the last year. We had gotten ourselves as church (not any one church but as church in general) ... I can't speak for all churches but I can speak pretty much for the Episcopal Church. We've gotten ourselves into a situation where we were so convinced we lived our lives in such a way that if you wanted to be in the presence of God, then you needed to be sitting in your church at 8 a.m or at 10 a.m (whatever service). It was Rite One, Rite Two and to receive Holy Communion (please hear me correctly on this): yes, we did experience the presence of Jesus in that. Our mistake -- the place where we diminished God's ability, the place where we took control -- was allowing ourselves to think that that was the only way. That there was only one way for us to be in the presence of God, there was only one way for us to receive the healing of Jesus Christ.

And when we go back to these resurrection stories, in this time where we are focused on resurrection, when we go back to the stories of the early church in this time, when we are focusing on how that this band of followers ... these people who were being taught by Jesus ... how they went from being this group of people following Jesus, trying to learn more about God, into being a church, into being the body of Christ, into being a collection, an assembly, a gathering of faithful people.

It's important for us to know their stories because when we know their stories, we're more able to see what is happening in our own story. Pandemic

has been a challenging, tragic, difficult, hard time for us as people, as nation, as community, as families -- in relationships and also in our churches. This has been difficult and there has been much to mourn and much to grieve and all along the way, God has been present with us too. There have been blessings all along the way: there have been discoveries of God's goodness, there's been the joy of being in the presence of other people who believe, and there has been that peace that comes from being in the presence of Jesus Christ.

What we have discovered in pandemic is that there are many ways for us to be in the presence of Jesus Christ and some of those happened in our own households. Some of them happen when we're worshiping online. You know, I have never once called it virtual worship, not once. There's nothing virtual about the gathering however we gather -- whether it's on a front porch, on the deck or a patio, in a park, online or in a church. When two or three of us are gathered, Jesus is there with us in powerful ways.

And it has changed who we are because resurrection changes everything; being in the presence of Jesus changes everything. It has allowed us to see God's blessing in the midst of so much disruption and chaos. These many ways that we have seen Jesus: gathering with each other online, praying for each other, checking on each other. Paying attention to what is happening with people who are truly struggling in our communities, in our families, in our churches, around the globe, around the country who do not look like us, who are suffering in ways that we don't understand why they're suffering in those ways. That Jesus has been with us in all of that, that there is no limitation at all to God's ability to be present with us.

Now, I know that there are people who are going to hear this and go, "I don't know how to make that happen and the only time I feel that is when I'm sitting in my church and receiving Communion. So I'm just gonna wait until that time comes." That

is certainly your choice and I know that Jesus will meet you there. But, my goodness! I wonder how many times you've been walking down the road with him, talking about what is happening in life, talking about your confusion and your hope. And Jesus was there and you simply did not recognize him.

I'm always touched in watching the ways that Jesus eats with people and wondering about our mealtimes and how often we may eat in front of television or a movie. And during this particular time, it seems we're spending more time eating with the people that we know and love, even if we're having to do that (I've done it sometimes with friends) online and we've been eating our meal together. I wonder in those ways how often we're aware that Jesus is a part of that meal. I used to have a friend that would always say, as a part of the grace. "Please Jesus, join us for lunch/please Jesus join us for dinner, be a part of this meal with us."

As challenging as this time has been, there has been something that we have learned about resurrection in it, about how creative God is, about how tenacious God is, about how generous God is. And that the last piece of this that's important for us to note is that, as Jesus in this particular passage in Luke, talks to those disciples and opens their minds and has a piece of fish with them, as he eats with them, he says, "you are witnesses to these things." Friends, we are witnesses to the resurrection, we are witnesses to God's love, we are witnesses to the presence of Jesus Christ among us. We are witnesses to the way God can bless us in the midst of incredible disturbance and deepest of worries, and that is the gift that each of us then turns around and gives to another. To bring our witness the way we are watching those people bring their witness in the courtroom right now in Minneapolis. We bring the witness of God's love to those who don't know about it, to those who are walking the road talking about their sorrows, talking about their worry and who need someone

to tell them that God is standing there with them, that they are not on their own.

Eastertide continues. I hope that at every opportunity you spend time wondering about resurrection and how it resonates in your life. And I especially hope and pray that you hear and hear -- frequently, daily, often -- Jesus whispering in your ear, standing by you, saying, "Peace be with you."

Amen.

Stories from Our Congregations

St. Andrew's, Harrington Park holds service of unity and support with Asian neighbors

After learning of the fear of violence experienced by their Asian neighbors, including members of their own congregation, St. Andrew's, Harrington Park held A Service of Unity and Support for the Asian Community the evening of Tuesday, April 13.

About 80 members of the congregation and the wider community attended the service, which included readings in Korean, Mandarin and Malayalam as well as English.

Participants included Harrington Park Mayor Paul A. Hoelscher and Councilwoman Joon Chung.

Attendees left the service eager to continue the conversation. St. Andrew's is working with Councilwoman Chung to bring together members of the wider community. "This is just the start of something," says Paul Shackford, one of the service organizers.

Diocesan Announcements

Clergy ministry transitions

Retirements

- The Rev. Diane Rhodes, Rector, St. Andrew's, Harrington Park - May 2, 2021