

Easter 3 –April 10, 2016

Text: Acts 9:1-21

Theme: "Pulling the Covers Over Your Head"

When kids are in bed at night and the room is dark and the wind is blowing and the closet door slowly creaks open, what do they do? They pull their covers over their heads! Why do kids think that will help? Where is it written that the evil monkey in your closet or the monster under your bed cannot breach your blankets? Do monsters have a horrible allergy to cotton and polyester?

We innately have an inner belief that if we cannot see it, we do not have to believe it. Human beings are the only animals that believe this. I know what you're thinking. What about ostriches? Don't they bury their heads in the sand when they are scared? Nope, not true. Ostriches dig holes in the sand with their beaks to make nests and it may look like they have their heads buried in the sand but they don't. Here ends your zoological lesson, now onto theology. The reason we pull the covers over our heads is because if we do not see what frightens us, we can more easily disbelieve that it is there. What do you do in the scary movie? You cover your eyes, right? Then it is easier to believe that what is on the screen is not real.

Seeing is indeed believing and if we don't see it, we can deny it. That's how we are about death as well. 150 years ago, when a loved one died, he usually died at home. The family washed him, dressed him and laid him out on the dining room table. Death was unavoidable. You couldn't deny it! But today, people die in institutions. Funeral homes come in, zip them into a heavy bag and whisk them down a service elevator to a waiting van which will take

them to the funeral home where they will be washed, dressed, have make-up applied and have their hair done so that at the wake, they just look like they are peacefully sleeping. We can pretend that they are not dead. It's just like pulling the covers over our heads.

Last week, do you think Thomas was pulling the covers over his head when he said he wouldn't believe unless he saw the holes in Jesus' hands? He was not trying to deny death. He couldn't deny death because he saw Jesus die on the cross. So, what was his denial about? I think he was in denial not of death but of the resurrection. It was just too much to hope for. The only good part about the death of Christ is that it was all over and they could go on with life, back to fishing for a living. But now, it seemed to be starting all over again. No. Thomas was done with it. He wanted to grieve, move on and go back to work.

But seeing is believing. He couldn't deny the holes in his hands and side. Jesus was definitely back from the dead and that elicited his famous confession, "My Lord and My God!" This is one of the most important moments in the Bible. If we do not believe in the Resurrection, then death is the end of us. We can dress it up and make it seem like we are just sleeping, but without the resurrection, death is final. Some people seem to want that. They want the finality of death so everything is clean and neat and done. But life is never done for us. Jesus appeared to Thomas, the fisherman in today's Gospel, later to St. Paul and finally to St. John on the Island of Patmos to make absolutely sure that everyone knew he had risen from the dead. Death is not the end, just a transition to eternal life.

St. Paul was terrified of a living, resurrected Lord. He had persecuted Jesus' followers. He had watched Stephen being stoned to death. He was afraid that if Jesus lived, he would be in grave trouble. Did God blind him? I don't think so. I think he was so terrified that the Lord was alive that he suffered what we call today hysterical blindness. The brain of person who is frightened enough can literally turn off their sight. St. Paul was soon to learn that he had no reason to fear for the Jesus he had thought dead was really quite alive and wanted to give him a gift. He wanted to give him eternal life.

Have you ever been to a funeral where everyone talks about what a swell person the deceased was? They go on and on about how great he was. They are trying to pull the covers over their heads and deny. But they deny not death, but life. They believe that if they talk enough about what a swell guy he was and about how his memory will live on in our minds, they don't have to acknowledge that the stuff we do in life is not all that important. Hey, I don't care if he was the walking embodiment of St. Francis and Mother Theresa combined, he was still a poor miserable sinner and now that he is dead, his life is really getting good!

I want to stand up in such funerals and ask, "So what? Get to the good part!" I want to hear about the resurrection! I want to hear about how death loses. It interrupts us but cannot stop us. I want to hear about how I will be with my loved one again and live eternally with him and with Jesus. That's what the resurrection is. The resurrection is the proclamation of real, eternal life! But the resurrection scares people more than death. What if the few short

years we spend on this earth are not what really matters? What if this is just a training ground, a staging area before real life begins?

Embrace the resurrection. Don't hide from it. Don't let the world pull the covers over your head because the idea of eternal life scares the bejeebers out of them. They want to know that their 401K matters. They want to think that their status and power mean something. They are scared to death that their lives of puny earthly accomplishments are meaningless. "It's all vanity," says the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. So they pull the covers over their heads and hide, but seeing is believing! Jesus stood before Thomas. Jesus stood before Paul. Jesus stood before John on Patmos. Jesus stood before Peter and the others and not only did they see him but he provided for them. They were professional fisherman and 153 large fish is a great catch. Then he made breakfast for them and they ate together. Does it ring a bell for you that eating together is connected with Jesus' post resurrection appearances?

Jesus stands before us again today as we receive his body and blood. He is reminding us again that this life is only the staging ground. He is giving us himself to eat and to drink to remind us that while we are on this earth, he will continue providing everything we need, but especially the spiritual food we need to live through this life and enter paradise with him. Fling off the blankets that are creeping over your head and embrace the resurrection. Embrace real life. Embrace eternal life.