

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my Savior. *Amen.*

Today after our 10:30 service, we'll celebrate with Susan Keith the ten years that have passed since she was declared free of cancer. It is a joyous occasion and I have no doubt the celebration will be also. On Friday Susan shared with me a video of an Easter greeting from St. Augustine Episcopal Church. The video depicted a celebration that would no doubt baffle those who are accustomed to our Sunday liturgy at St. Francis, and might even offend others. Loud and happy music coming from guitars and other instruments provided just the right mood for the priests and deacons and servers to come dancing down the aisle to celebrate Easter. Susan commented that it would be interesting to see such a celebration at St. Francis, and I hope this is the sort of celebration that she receives later today. I know that she is exceedingly thankful for what must feel like a makeover of her life.

We have no small fascination with makeovers, particularly makeovers of homes, sometimes of people or restaurants, just about anything that can be improved or made more appealing. There are a lot of shows on television that take the viewer through the makeover process. Some of you will remember a show that ran on Sunday evenings for several seasons called "Extreme Home Makeover." The producers would choose a family who lived in deplorable conditions and who also had some obstacle that kept them from being able to take care of themselves and their home. Some had lived through a sad or traumatic event or lived with chronic debilitating health issues; others dedicated all of their time or money to help others while neglecting their own needs. While they were off enjoying a week's vacation arranged by the producers, the crew and hundreds of volunteers would replace their house with a better one and the process and progress of construction became the focus of the show.

At the end of their vacation, the family would be brought back home to see their new house for the first time. They're excited and grateful, overwhelmed by the crowds of people who have come to celebrate their good fortune and to witness the "big reveal." That, of course, will be the highlight of the show. But the family can't see the house because they've been positioned behind the bus that brought them home. So everyone begins shouting "Driver, move that bus. Move that bus." As the bus leaves and they can clearly see the gift that's been given to them, they know their lives have been changed.

In today's Gospel lesson from Luke, we watch as the disciples experience their own "big reveal." But they aren't excited and grateful, not like the folks on Extreme Home Makeover. This makeover is altogether too real! The women, and later Peter, had found the tomb empty, so they knew something was up. Then Cleopas and another of Jesus' followers had met him in that famous encounter on the road to Emmaus. But that was entirely different: when they saw him on the road, "their eyes were kept from recognizing" Jesus, at least until he told them who he was.

On the road Jesus reveals himself gently, in a way that wasn't so shocking, and knowing it's him *does* leave them excited and grateful. So they rush right back to Jerusalem, find the disciples and the rest of Jesus' entourage, and begin telling others they've seen the Lord. All of a sudden Jesus pops into the room. Just like that. Looking just the way he looked before he was crucified, except for the wounds from his Passion. They think they're seeing a ghost! As always, Jesus knows what they're thinking. In true Jesus "fashion," he comforts them *and* chides them, almost in the same breath. "Why do you have doubts? It's me. Touch me. What's for supper?"

The disciples and Jesus' other followers are the recipients of the biggest, the best, *the most incredible* makeover possible. Jesus has risen, but it's their makeover—it's Peter and John and

James and Andrew and all the others who are being transformed. Seeing him with their own eyes, touching him with their own hands, having dinner with him—there's no way they can deny, or even doubt, his resurrection. Jesus' "big reveal" proves that everything he told them was true. Their lives have already been changed by their association with him and now they're seeing for themselves that everything written about him in scripture is true. The way they live will never again be the same.

At the end of each Extreme Home Makeover program, I often wondered what we would see months or years later if we stepped back into the lives of those families who received life-changing kindness and generosity from others. I wondered how they would respond, in the long-run, to the gift they had been given. Would their new home give them the safety and security they longed for. Would they share with others the effects of the abundant gifts they were given. Would they, at the very least, tell everyone about what had been given them? Or would they just settle back into their lives?

We don't have to wonder about Jesus' followers, about how they responded to the gift of God's son. We can look to scripture to see what happened. It's no coincidence that during the season of Easter, our first lesson each Sunday comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Today we see how Peter, the simple fisherman who couldn't quite get "it" while Jesus was alive, has stepped right into the role Jesus prepared him for. Peter's belief in Christ and his faith in God's Good News has him healing the sick, and not just that, but also speaking confidently and boldly to his critics, calling them to repent and turn to God. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke has recorded for us accounts of how the lives of those first witnesses are transformed by the resurrected Christ, *and* how they respond to the transformation.

It's too bad we can't just fall into their footsteps. Too bad we find it so hard to grasp and believe their account of the resurrected Christ. Do you believe in the resurrection? Do you *really* believe? Or do you, like those first followers have your doubts? What are the obstacles in your way? What keeps you from believing deep in your heart that Christ is risen? Is it logic? Common sense? Good judgment? Unsolved mystery? You're not alone, you know. Christians in every generation since the first Acts of the Apostles have struggled with doubt and fear that lead us away from the Love and Truth of the resurrected Christ, truth that cannot be proven by fact—only by faith.

Those first Christians are not just witnesses "of" the risen Christ, they are also witnesses "to" the risen Christ. When he appears to them on that day, he tells them "that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations." Surely they question Jesus about how he has come back to them. They see their resurrected savior with their own eyes. They cannot possibly understand exactly how he has come to them. But they *see him!* They *know* he isn't a ghost because they speak with him, and touch him, and eat fish with him. He reveals himself to them and their doubts fall away.

He reveals himself to us, too: weekly at his table we eat with him; daily we touch him, constantly he speaks to us and we may speak with him. But there seems to be something in the way, some obstacle that keeps us from knowing totally and completely that we are seeing the risen Christ all around us.

The makeover families could see the obstacle that kept them from witnessing the "big reveal." All they had to do was say, "Driver! Move that bus!" Seeing the obstacle that blinds us to the "big reveal" may not be that simple. First we have to identify what it is. And then we must ask for it to be removed. "Driver, move that bus" might not be the right thing to ask. But "Lord, open the eyes of my heart so I can see" is surely what our Lord wants to hear. And all we have to do is ask for that to happen.

*Amen.*