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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

April 18, 2021

3 Easter, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary

[Acts 3:12-19](#)

[1 John 3:1-7](#)

[Luke 24:36b-48](#)

[Psalm 4](#)

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One winter morning in 1891, the people of Randolph County, Virginia, emerged from their homes to find two feet of fresh snow on the ground. That wasn't so unusual. What was unusual was that the surface of the snow was covered with worms. Live, wriggling worms. Sometimes up to four inches of worms. No one could quite figure out where they had come from. Some thought they'd come up out of the ground, but the snow was crusty and undisturbed. Some thought they'd fallen from the sky. It happened several more times that winter. No one could quite explain it. Fun fact.<sup>1</sup>

In 1846 an English gentleman adventurer, of the kind they had back then, found an interesting snail in the Egyptian desert and sent it home to the British Museum. The curators, presuming it was dead, glued it to a card and put it in storage. For four years it sat there, until 1850, when someone noticed a suspicious-looking filmy trail on the card. When the curators gave it a warm bath and offered it some

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ripleys.com/weird-news/cartoon-04-17-2017/>; *Journal of Microscopy and Natural Science* 11 (1892), 118.

cabbage, the snail poked its head out of its shell, none the worse for wear after its long hibernation. The so-called “Lazarus snail” lived another two years and its shell is still in the museum’s collection. Fun fact.<sup>2</sup>

In about the year 33 a political criminal was executed outside Jerusalem. A few days later it was discovered that not only was his body missing, his followers were actually meeting him alive again. Several people saw him walking, talking, and eating fish. Fun fact.

Now one of these facts is not like the others. Because only one of them started a movement. Only one of them flung people out into the world to share the message like we heard Peter doing today. Only one of them transformed lives and is still transforming them today. Nobody was ever flung out into the street or had their life transformed by news about a hibernating snail or a freak of worms and weather. Those things are cool and weird. Resurrection is cool and weird. But Peter’s listeners don’t just scratch their heads and say, “Huh. Fun fact.” They see a man healed in the name of Jesus and they hear the message of resurrection and they know this news isn’t just something to hear about: it’s something to act on.

I have a relative who, when he retired, took up a hobby of collecting frequent-flier miles. He and his wife have literally traveled around the world on very little money just by finding these special offers and amassing huge totals of points and miles. There’s a whole community of blogs and experts and people who do this. You can go to points and miles conferences. And when there’s a particularly good offer, my relative will send out an e-mail to friends and family, and he titles it, “News you

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.metafilter.com/151242/The-desert-snail-at-once-awoke-and-found-himself-famous>.

can use.” News you can use, something not just to file away as trivia but to take action on.

That’s something a little closer to the gospel than just reading about a fun historic fact. The resurrection is news we can use. But it’s more than that too. Because it’s news that will use *us*. If you act on a great points and miles offer, it might change your travel opportunities. But if you act on this news, it will change your life.

When Peter shares the good news with the people, he doesn’t say, “Sign up for this rewards program.” He says, *Metanoēsate*, which we translate “repent” but has very little to do with how we use that word in English today. We think of “repent” as something like feeling bad about your past misdeeds. But *metanoia* means something more like “reorient your whole self.” It doesn’t have much to do with how you *feel* but how you *act*. It means changing your behavior and your worldview, which often happens in that order rather than the other way around.

Now we have several of these sermons of Peter’s from the book of Acts, and in others of them Peter spells out more of what *metanoia* means. It means being baptized. It means you’ll receive the Holy Spirit. It means joining a new community with a whole new way of life. Acts describes that way of life this way: the new believers devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers. It says they share their possessions and care for those in need. It’s the same way of life we commit ourselves to every time we renew our baptismal covenant from the Prayer Book, just as we did at the Great Vigil of Easter. It’s an Easter way of life, and it’s countercultural, and it’s profoundly attractive today just as it was back then.

What matters most about the resurrection isn't the fact on its own that a dead person once was found alive again. By itself that could be just a curiosity, an unexplained quirk of nature that leaves us scratching our heads, then shrugging and going on with our lives. What matters is who that person was, and is. He was the one who proclaimed the reign of God was near, who healed the sick and fed the hungry and said the greatest is the one who serves. He was the one who had already gathered a movement around himself, and when he was crucified it looked like that movement had died with him. But he didn't stay dead. He's alive today and his movement is marching. You and I have been swept up in it. And it won't stop until God's love and glory have filled up the entire world.

How did you get swept up in it? Just the fact you're here today participating in this service means this news has touched you in some way, maybe a way that has changed your life. What is it about this person of Jesus that reaches to your heart? What is it that makes you not just file it away but makes you want to transform your life, to let this news use you?

It might be different for different people. Maybe for you it had to do with the search for community. Or for justice. Or for meaning, or beauty, or human dignity, or truth. It was different for people in first-century Jerusalem than it is for people in twenty-first-century California—or Sri Lanka—or Nigeria. And part of what's so good about this news is that it's big enough and good enough to speak to the longings of everybody.

Because what we have to share in the risen Jesus is not a fun fact, but a new life.