

Have you sensed an overarching theme this Easter? If you have, what is it? It's probably not what you expected. No, looking back at the last few Gospel readings, they've all had one thing in common: fear . . . yes, fear.

A couple weeks ago, it was Easter Sunday. There was an empty tomb, a young man in white, and the good news that Christ is not here but risen! So, do the women gathered there at that tomb rejoice? Mark tells us that they "fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." For them, Easter was a scary thing.

Then last Sunday, John gave us a full report of the events that happened later that day. Before the risen Christ suddenly POOF! makes His appearance to the disciples, John told us that they had the doors locked "for fear of the Jews." You can almost feel the tension in the room—all of them grabbing each other by the lapels, sputtering like madmen—"Did you see that, didja see what they did to Jesus!"—Gulp!—"We're next!" For them, Easter was scary too.

And today, things don't look much better. In fact, this morning's Gospel sounds strikingly similar to last week's, doesn't it? It's another version of how the risen Christ suddenly POOF! appears to His disciples behind locked doors. But don't be deceived—as similar as the two accounts are, there is one very big difference. Last week, John told us that the disciples were afraid *before* Jesus showed up, but then "the disciples were *glad* when they saw the Lord." But this week, Luke puts it in reverse order—they seem to be doing just fine, but then when the risen Christ appears "they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit." Interesting how before they were afraid in the *absence* of Jesus, but today it's the *presence* of Jesus that makes everyone jump out of their skin. It's like they don't so much have the doors locked "for fear of the Jews" so much as for fear of Jesus. Now, how do you explain that?

Any horror buffs here? Well, if so, then maybe you can explain to us what makes movies about hauntings just so powerful. It's a scary thought that the spirit world just might have some unfinished business with us, seek some kinda revenge on the human world. And that might help explain why the disciples' hearts are beating out of their chests.

If you or I were a denier like Peter, putting up our hands three times in defense—"I don't even know the man"—we'd probably be scared that the ghost of Jesus might return someday to raise a hand against us. Or, if you or I were like the rest of the disciples who abandoned Jesus, fleeing on foot when He got arrested, we'd probably be scared that Jesus's ghost might return to give us the swift kick in the pants we deserve. If it was you or I in that locked room, we'd probably be holding up our hands to protect ourselves, and putting out our feet to block whatever comes our way. That might explain why the disciples seem to be just as afraid of Jesus today as they are of the Jews, why they'd be just as scared of His *presence* as His absence.

But while they're putting up their dukes to defend themselves, Jesus puts up His. And instead of making a fist, the risen Christ reaches for the sky in surrender, as if to say, "See, I'm unarmed." *Hey, I know these hands from somewhere*, each disciple thinks. *These are the same hands that danced through the air while my Rabbi taught. These are the same hand that weren't afraid to touch lepers and reach out to sinners. These are the same hands that broke bread with us in the upper room just days ago.*

Then, slipping off His sandals, as if to say, "Look, I'm not gonna give you the boot," the risen Christ shows them His feet. And seeing these too, each disciple thinks they look familiar. *Hey, these are the same feet that traveled with us hundreds of miles to bring the Good News. These are the same feet that entered the homes of people like Zacchaeus, the tax collector. These are the same feet of our Master, that remained dirty and neglected, while He knelt down like a lowly servant to wash ours.*

But none of the disciples had seen them since the cross. They winced at them now, making sucking noises. There were ugly, awful bruises where the nails had been. But after the risen Christ opened their minds to understand the Scriptures—"that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness

of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations”—their fear melted away. How could this be a ghost back to haunt them, when this was the plan all along? No, standing before them, still chewing a bite of fish, was none other than their risen Savior—whose death was to take away their sins, and whose resurrection was to give them eternal life!

Honestly, I don’t know how they missed it—looking back at the Gospel this morning, Jesus already told them that He comes in peace. Even before all this fear of ghosts business, the first words out of His mouth are, “Peace be with you!” But the disciples react like it never happened—no, it’s the very next verse that we’re told how startled and frightened they were. Maybe that “Peace” fell on deaf ears, because instead of looking at the risen Christ’s hands and feet, they were too busy looking at their own—*their* hands that denied Him, *their* feet that abandoned Him—and how *they* deserved the swift hand of justice and to get kicked out of His good graces.

Y’know, this kinda reminds me of us. I mean, we can hear it our whole lives—that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; that He’s our Prince of Peace—yet we can still act like it never happened. For example—toward the end of every Church Year, we always hear readings about Christ’s return in judgment. And all the talk about separating the sheep from the goats, about the record books being opened, about how each one of us will have to give an account of ourselves to God, well, it’s enough to raise anybody’s blood pressure. Instead of looking at Christ’s nail-pierced hands, we look at our own. We see the hands that have grabbed so much, the hands that’ve been raised in anger, the hands that have done so many awful things.

Or another example—sometimes we’re confronted with our mortality, with the fact that we’ll have to meet our Maker someday. And faced with the prospect of heaven or hell, cloud 9 or fire and brimstone, angels or devils, well, it’s enough to give anybody a panic attack. Once again, instead of looking at the nail-pierced feet of Christ, we look at our own. We see the feet that have kicked against God, so often wandered astray, stood knee-deep in sin. It’s no wonder we’re like the disciples—we can hear “Peace, peace,” but there is no peace.

So, as we put up our hands and feet to shield ourselves from what we think we have coming, history repeats itself. Just like in the Gospel today, the risen Christ stands among us—showing us again His hands and His feet. “See, look,” He says, “these are the same hands and feet that kept God’s Law perfectly for you. The same hands and feet that were crucified for you. The same hands that bore your sin, the same feet that now stand victoriously over it. The same hands and feet that pull you into the kingdom, bring you closer to God, raise you out of death into immortality. They are the same hands and feet that are ever before God’s presence, always interceding for you at the right hand of the Father.” Now, how could we think hands and feet like those would ever hurt us?

No, instead, like the disciples today, they continue to bless us . . . and to make us a blessing. Before today’s Gospel reading is over, Jesus tells His disciples that they are to be His witnesses. They will represent Him, serve in His stead, carry on His ministry on His behalf. In short, they will be *His* hands and *His* feet to the world.

That’s the way the Gospel closes this morning, and that’s how worship will soon close today. You see, the same thing happens to us—you and I become the hands and the feet of the risen Christ. Shortly, we will eat and drink His true body and blood, and we become His true body and blood. Quite literally we, the Church, are the Body of Christ. And as His body, you and I are His hands and feet. Your hands are not yours anymore, neither are your feet your own. But when you look at them you are to see Christ’s—holy and righteous. Your hands are His hands, your feet are His feet—making the places you go holy and the things you do righteous.

I love how one saint, Teresa of Avila, once put it:

*Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.*

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Rev. David V. Miller  
Lutheran Church of the Ascension  
Atlanta, GA

*Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.*

Today, the risen Christ send you out to be His witness. Have no fear—He'll lend you a hand.