

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

Take Heart! With Eyes wide open ...you are witnesses of these things...

Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, AND a change of heart and life FOR the forgiveness of sins be preached to all nations, beginning from right here, right now, in Jerusalem and West Friendship and beyond! LOOK... I'm sending to you what's promised...heavenly power...and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth!

WOW! No wonder the gospel writer remarks how they are overwhelmed with joy, full of praises and songs and worshipping! This is the same kind of joy and praise that is described in the psalm 47, read earlier. There is JOY, and no doubt dancing. I mention dancing because there is great transformation that occurs in dancing. It is good for your heart, your soul, your mind, your spirit, your body. Dancing is an expression... truly an embodiment of inward feeling.

But honestly, the writer of Luke and of Acts is addressing a bigger community issue: WHAT do we do now? Who will lead? What is the next thing we should do? Frankly, this scripture has a purpose...to communicate how the early church understood the resurrection and learned to cope with the absence of Jesus' physical body. They remember the stories of Jesus ministry and how he appeared after his resurrection. This is the transition from earthly life to heavenly residence. This is an important centering of the community for JOY-full mission. There is no going back to what was... there is only moving forward.

I think this is true for the Saint James faithful and for our world as a whole. We are like the CICADAs, emerging from our time of seclusion. We will soon be busy moving about (have you noticed the increase in traffic lately?) and, with shouts of Hallelujah and dancing feet, celebrating moving about outdoors and indoors without masks.

We will still, many of us, be wearing masks, but gradually, as more and more people choose to be vaccinated, there will be strength in numbers to

help keep the virus abated. It will still be present, but, not decimating herds of people.

The gospel tells us that the past 40 days after resurrection Jesus was representing his central message and mission of the 'kingdom of God'. The disciples had a hard time understanding it... I think people today too often are missing the essence of the mission and message.

We pray for it as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us... 'thy kingdom come'.

The kingdom (kin-dom) is rooted in LOVE, where justice is done, where people experience abundant life, where no one needs to go hungry or without home. JUSTICE is right relationship - to God, to neighbor, to self, to creation. LOVE is at the heart of relationship. Where poverty prevails, justice and the reign of God are absent. Notice Jesus' option for poor and excluded people. Jesus set aside privilege to walk this earth and show us how to bring God's will in heaven to earth.

This is important to remember as we live into the new realities and revelations unveiled during the time of seclusion. We saw clearly there is a need for work for racial justice, there is a need to address job security and food insecurity. There is a need to address healthy habits for bodies and for our minds and our spirit.

I am grateful that the strategic planning team recognized how important it was for Saint James to continue to support our community groups, like AA and the Scouts.

I am grateful that faithful folks in the congregation have been consistent supporters for the local food banks. We've also added an additional related ministry of supporting weekend food for 2 schools, collaborating with our sister church in Glenelg.

I am grateful that leaders in the church supported the vision to keep Saint James online and producing meaningful worship even when we couldn't enter the buildings.

Now we are preparing to continue that ministry as we pivot to learning new technology, practicing how to use it, and start a new chapter in worship outreach, both inside and outside the building.

These are examples of the embodiment of the hands and feet of Christ doing the work of Christ in the world. These are JOY-full acts of mission and message.

JOY-full means: Jesus, Others, Yourself...that's justice, in that order.

That's why, dear friends, we focus on taking Heart; having courage.

Just as the song lyric says... it is hard to do things alone. It is better when someone is with you... and that's what Christian community is all about.

It's Not the pastor; not the 'membership'; it is the accompaniment as we walk to do the mission of loving and serving God and others.

The pebble is a reminder of accompaniment...Dare, its name. Dare to do the hard things of putting Jesus & Others first, before yourself. Build one another up as we work side by side... preparing the yard sale, the baked goods, removing weeds, singing in the choir, serving in Vacation Bible School, sharing a childrens' message, worshipping outside or inside.

By My Side, with JOY... **transformed... once timid, fearful now remembering how we have been accompanied through this season. take heart, have courage and DARE to walk forward in ministry sharing the good news, just as we've heard in the scripture readings today .**

May it be so!