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“Then he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled?’” (Luke 24:38).

Third Sunday of Easter

There may be or should be a stage play about the Apostles cowering in the locked upper room after the death of Jesus. We see them in their fear, grief and shame arguing about who failed the most to let this disaster overtake them. They had all fled, but Judas was the villain, or it was Peter who led the way in the cowardice they all shared. The scorching dialogue would hold us all accountable and in desperate need of mercy before relief lifted us up with hope instead of indictment as the curtain falls on a stunned audience.

Jesus is, of course, already present, but invisible until the Apostles reconcile and embrace one another with forgiveness. Faith precedes the new reality, and as soon as the Apostles believe that Jesus is alive, they see him, feel his peace and share the Eucharist that makes them one with him and with each other again.

Still one of the most moving attempts to convey this moment is the end of Franco Zeffirelli’s 1977 masterpiece, *Jesus of Nazareth*, when Mary Magdalene, fresh from her encounter with the risen Jesus, rebukes the other Apostles for their disbelief, and Peter leads them forward to faith again with his affirmation that it must be true because Jesus would never have abandoned them as they abandoned him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50liF1rTTGQ>

Has it not occurred to us that our divisions and quarrels within the church and among the churches are what have prevented us from really believing in the

crucified and risen Christ? Have our ideologies and theologies blinded us to the wounded body of Jesus right before us asking to be touched and fed and believed in as God's presence in the least of our brothers and sisters in the world?

We learn mercy by first receiving it for our failures and cowardice. Life must break our hearts before it can enlarge them to carry God's immense mercy to the ends of the earth. The Gospel begins with "Do not be afraid," for God has loved us while we were sinners and turned our tepid faith and indifference into hearts that burn when we hear the Scriptures and see the Lord's death in the breaking of the bread. This is the living memory of how much he loves us and why he rose to send us forth with that same love to save the world. Are we not witnesses to these things?

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