

### ***Let the Discovery Process Begin!***

Acts 3:12-19 ~ 1 John 3:1-7 ~ Luke 24:36b-48

Hendrik Kraemer was a bishop and leader of the church in Denmark in the 1930s and 40s. He described the panic that overtook the clergy of his diocese as the Nazis marched in to take possession of their country. The clergy came to his house and asked, “What should we do?” The bishop answered, “First, we must ask who we are! If we know who we are, then we will know what to do.”

That’s exactly the challenge, the task and the GIFT of this time of transition for St. John’s. When you know who you are, you will know what to do. It will become clear what God is calling you to do next, and you will know who and what you need in your next rector to lead you into living into that calling, that next faithful step.

Today we launch the transition task of *discovering* who you are. That’s the “Discovery Process,” as you’ll see in your *Journey Pages*. And shortly you’ll be hearing from some of the leaders of that Discovery Process. Our readings today on this third Sunday of Easter give some guiding light as we begin this journey together. Even now on this *third* Sunday of Easter, three weeks out from the discovery of the empty tomb, we are still in chaos and confusion. Today we meet the risen Christ again on Easter evening. He shows up and the disciples are *startled and terrified*. They think they are seeing a ghost. Maybe their terror led them to think this ghost was sent by God to “haunt” them. After all, they had abandoned their master at the time of his arrest on Thursday evening. They didn’t show up at *all* for his passion and death, except for Peter’s cowardly denial. And they weren’t believing the testimony of the women who witnessed his resurrection. Chaos and confusion, terror and fear reign. Rosabeth Moss Kanter is a professor in the Harvard Business School. I wonder if this is the story that inspired her famous quote: “Everything looks like failure in the middle.” That’s true for the death and resurrection of Jesus and the formation of the Christian church. And that’s true for times of transition in congregations. That’s true for raising a child or repairing a home appliance. Everything looks like failure in the middle.

Last Monday this room was packed with over two hundred people. St. John’s hosted a memorial service for Ken Walberg. Ken’s daughter was married here, but she is now a member of St. John’s in Westland and the priest there was on his honeymoon. I got the call on Saturday about having the service on Monday, and we pulled our team together and pulled it off. Ken was a catcher for the Tigers in the 1950s, the father of five and an avid UM fan. Everybody who came to the service was wearing a Tigers jersey or the maize and blue of UM. The positive energy of the crowd was wonderful. But it wasn’t a funeral – it was a memorial service. We make that distinction because there was no body present. And no ashes present either. You see, family from Florida and California had come to see him while he was still living, and he died. They had plane tickets home Monday night. So they decided to scramble and have a service on Monday while everyone was still here. But his ashes wouldn’t be ready until Thursday.

Which brings us back to the chaos and confusion of Easter. There was no body then either – in the middle, when all looked like failure. And when Christ does appear in his resurrected body, they think he’s a ghost. And what does Jesus do? He comes to them and meets them where they are – startled and terrified. He invites them to touch his risen body, and he eats a “piece of broiled fish.” For sure, ghosts don’t eat! He demonstrates that there is continuity in the midst of change. Ultimately, the disciples recognize him because he looked enough like who they had known him to be before. If he had appeared to them as something or someone so completely different so as to be unrecognizable, we wouldn’t be sitting here today.

A guiding light for us here is that as you move toward the future, remember that lasting change comes more through evolution than revolution. Change that has integrity and staying power has continuity. It's about becoming more of what and who you've always been. If the goal is to write a new chapter in St. John's story, then it is essential that the story be thoroughly understood and respected, and that the *new* chapter pick up and advance the plot.

That in fact is what is happening in our first reading. Peter is responding to the people who are dumbfounded by the miracles the disciples are performing in the name of Jesus. And Peter says, "Why does this take you by such complete surprise, and why stare at us as if *our* power or piety made him walk?" Then he grounds what they are witnessing in their history: "The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his Son Jesus." Understanding who you are begins with understanding who and what you've been.

Here's how that worked for one church: during the nineties a congregation was touched by the AIDS crisis. That was hugely controversial at the time. Yet congregational leaders believed their next faithful step involved some form of an AIDS ministry, given the reality of the community in which the congregation was planted. It seemed a radical departure for this community of faith. But then the committee chair shared this story from the congregation's history: "During the Great Depression, our church was the only church in the country to permit its buildings to be used for government programs on behalf of those in need throughout the region. In recalling that story, he realized, "That's us." At first he was concerned that he did not know of any other church in the area with an AIDS ministry. But then he realized that fact didn't bother him. In fact, he said, "That's who we are. We are people willing to be the first to do what others are reluctant to do – so long as it clearly is going to help other people in the name of Christ. Stepping out first for others is just who we are as a church."

What should *we* do during this time of transition? "First," Bishop Kraemer would say, "We must ask who we are! If we know who we are, then we will know what to do." We have one more guiding light about that question for this time of transition. It comes from our second reading from First John: "Beloved, we are God's children NOW." That's who you are: God's children. And that's all you need to know right now. That's enough for now. "What we will be," our second reading says, "has not yet been revealed." And so you step together today into this process of discovery with the disciples.

How patiently Jesus brings the disciples into the mystery of his risen life. How patiently he brings you into this same mystery. He comes to you wherever you are – now. No matter whether you are faltering in your ability to be faithful, or are terrified by the chaos you encounter, or stray from what is best and whole in your daily living, Jesus touches you with his forgiveness and invites you to forgive others. Jesus invites you to come to his table, feeding you with his risen Body. He is known in the breaking of the bread, in the goodness that surrounds you, the hope that encourages you, and the love that strengthens you. Let the Discovery Process begin. Christ is risen! Alleluia! (The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

*Pastor Dana Runestad*

Third Sunday of Easter ~ 15 April 2018  
St. John's Episcopal Church

Sources:

Lovett H. Weems, Jr., [Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church](#), Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2003, p. 19, 72-3, 112, 147.  
"Third Sunday of Easter," in [Living Liturgy 2012](#), Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011, p. 113