

I thought it would be a run of the mill zoom meeting

I was sitting in my office on a quiet Thursday afternoon sipping a cup of tea, and had just clicked on a *Join Zoom Meeting* link...something we've all done more times than we can count over the past year...and the screen slowly began to populate....with more and more squares, until there was 8 of us or so.....After taking care of a few housekeeping matters...someone reads a portion of Scripture, I think it was the story of the angels ministering to Jesus in the wilderness....and the atmosphere of the zoom meeting began to change...as person after person shared....stories from their own lives...about how they had been in the wilderness...their own barren wilderness....all of our experiences are different...but we all spoke about the basic contours of wilderness....as we all shared...we each leaned in...as much as you can do on zoom....as these stories of wilderness...also became stories...of how they had experienced manna from God..there too.....about how God had sent people into their wilderness...to minister to them...to be with them....to support them....and after person after person...shared how this Scripture had come alive in their own life...through stories of vulnerability and pain ...and how God had shown up even there....stories of faith come to life....I thought to myself...*this isn't your run of the mill zoom meeting anymore....*

Pastor Lyle was also in this meeting....him and I shared some of our own experiences...but mostly listened to the testimonies of these others...and he said to me..."can you believe we get paid for this...?"

And, honestly I couldn't.....because there...sipping my tea on a thursday afternoon...on zoom of all places....The risen Jesus had found his way in to our zoom rooms....through the risen body of Christ at Grace Lutheran Church...in the suburbs of Chicago...in 2021...The risen Jesus was there in our midst....and abundant life was springing forth....

And, I guess we shouldn't be surprised that Jesus...the one who has risen from the dead and is now alive again.....showed up....there on zoom...But, still it's sometimes unexpected when and where he shows up....

They were not really expecting him either....well, I'm not exactly sure what they were expecting that night....but their friend and companion...

the one they thought was the savior and messiah...the one in whom they had staked their life....he had just died...on a Roman cross...a couple days ago...a confluence of grief, confusion, loss, trauma....had seized them...and they were huddled together in vigil...in an upper room....they even had locked the doors...to try to keep some quiet...some semblance of privacy....

Like I said....I'm not sure exactly what they were expecting....if anything at all....but there...in the evening...still on the first day of the week....all of their emotions still fresh....Jesus of Nazareth...the one who had been crucified...showed up... coming through their own literal locked doors...and through the locked doors of fear and loss and the locked doors of sin and death...which we often feel stuck in too....without a way to the other side...

the risen Jesus appeared to them....when they were least expecting him....flesh and blood and all...and he was quite busy that night in the upper room...with an intimate and transforming love...that comes close...(just like how he comes to you and me)....he breathes on them...offers them his peace...and shows them his wounded flesh....The risen Jesus found his way into their lives....he found his way through their own locked doors...and abundant life springs forth.....

On that Thursday...in the middle of the day....on zoom....of all places....the risen Jesus...found his way in...and showed up...not in a way you might expect....just in a way that you knew he had found his way in...to the meeting and our lives...as we told testimony....and witnessed God's work in each of our lives...through vulnerable and supportive community....through sharing our faith and our experiences together....from sorrow to joy and everything in between...you could almost feel abundant life...like a drink of cold water on a hot day...refreshing our souls and springing up right there.....the kind of abundant life...that Jesus...always brings when he shows up.....these groups have just begun to meet at Grace...and we are calling them faith sharing groups....reach out if you want in....I imagine the risen Jesus will continue to find his way in to those zoom rooms...and we will glimpse/experience/feel/taste his abundant life...in our own bodies.... When it feels like we stuck behind locked doors....and without a place to share....believing the lie that we have to live this Christian life on our own...and be self-sufficient....or like our faith life is private...or we cannot share....or like our testimony is not worth sharings....Jesus walks through those locked doors holding them wide open for us and we find ways to connect with God and one another in deep and transforming kind of ways....

In the coming weeks and months you will hear about how Grace is once again looking partner with Refugee One....to support a refugee family...sometime in the not too distant future...and you will be invited to participate....and as we take risks together.....offering our time and our resources.....to benefit people who are seeking a better life....to bless people who will begin as strangers....to us....through our own locked doors of comfort and self-centeredness....holding tightly to our own perspectives and possessions.... world-views, and cultures....The risen Jesus will find his way in to those locked doors and fling them open for us....and give us another vision of abundant life that we can taste/feel/see/experience....beyond what we could have ever imagined....blindness get removed and a wider and more expansive vision of the kingdom of God is birthed...where our worlds

get bigger...and our community expands..through interacting with people who are not like us...The risen Jesus will show up and abundant life will happen....

It's not only in those locked doors that the risen Jesus finds his way through and keep open for us to walk through to find abundant life....

No.....In all the locked doors of sin and death this world tries to shut us into the risen Jesus finds his way in...breaks through....and stands among us offering us something new and better.....in our own locked doors of fear....and curved inwardness....the risen Jesus....finds his way into our lives....and speaks to us....peace and forgiveness...

through this word proclaimed...and through each other....he finds us....again and again...and stands among us....turns that key and flings wide that door showing us a life of freedom from sin and guilt a life where we are justified by faith and not works...and now can give ourselves away for the sake of this world...

In the locked doors of weariness and tiredness that we all seemed locked in these days...even during the season of Easter....even in the midst of spring...especially...now as vaccinations...and cases continue to go up and we are all just not-sure what the future is going to be like....

Not sure what to think...or feel...the risen Jesus...finds his way in...and breathes his spirit into our bodies....and promises to walk with us...promises to accompany us...every step of our lives journey...promises to give us what we need for the road ahead...and the risen Jesus turns the key and stands among us....not making everything better...or fixing everything...but giving us...the Spirit....that enlivens our bones...so that we can stand in solidarity with others...caring for eachother...and look forward to a future...that belongs to this God who reveals God's Self in Jesus...

A future like we saw in that upper room....where wounds and doubts are welcome...and we can bring all of our selves.....where vulnerability and mutual care and sharing what we have with others are not opposed to....but the very fruits of resurrection life! And a life where the risen Jesus shows up on zoom and among refugees and in dark upper rooms just as much as he does in bright sanctuaries and on spiritual mountaintops....

And...in the locked doors of death itself....Jesus comes among us....as the one who has gone down to death ahead of us...taken the key...and opened up that door forever...and stands...as the crucified and risen Lord...and with that door knocked down...we now can embrace our own brokenness and frailty...and death...and die every day to the ways of this world...and rise again to live our baptized lives....each of us....living as signs of this abundant life that Jesus always brings...speaks...breathes....as gift...

So.....I'm just saying...be on the look out...in zoom rooms...among strangers...with each other...and in this place...and in your life....all over....wherever the doors seem locked by this world...the risen Jesus just might turn the key and find his way to you....showing you himself...which is Life Abundant...Even in what you are temped to call a run of the mill zoom meeting...

Alleluia Christ is risen!