

**“Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are a joyful, growing community of disciples, travelers, and seekers who radiate God’s love. Through peaks and valleys, we bring the light of the Risen Christ to the world by welcoming, cherishing, and serving all.”** The words of our parish’s vision statement stand in sharp contrast with the disciples of the early church in today’s gospel. The eleven disciples gathered in that upper room are a church with no plan, no promise, no programs, no social justice committee, no parking lot. It was a chaotic little church. The gospel suggests they were locked in the upper room, terrified! The tomb is open, but their minds are closed. This frightened little band of disciples huddled in the corner of a room had only one thing going for it: the Risen Christ! In the final analysis, this is a story about how the risen Christ pushed open the bolted door – the risen Christ enters the fearful chamber and fills the place with his own life. The room was haunted by absence and was full of bittersweet memories. It was there that the Lord had washed their feet and celebrated the Last Supper with them. But it was also there that they had sworn loyalty to Jesus, loyalty which did not even last through the night. The apostles were wounded by fear, doubt, guilt, grief, and despair. Their unity was broken – Judas was dead, and Thomas was going through a crisis of faith.

**Jesus did not wait for them to come to him. He came to them, while they were still fearful and guilt-ridden. There was no blame, no recrimination. He knew how they were feeling. He brought them something they desperately needed. He said to them, “Peace be with you.” He said it not once but twice to make sure it sank in. They received both his peace and his forgiveness.**

**Suddenly the greatness and wonder of it struck them: death had been overcome, evil had been overcome, their sins and betrayal had been overcome. God was faithful. God had triumphed, love had triumphed, life had triumphed over all the evil forces. A fresh start was possible.**

**Our God is exceptionally gentle with us. There was no harshness, only courage that healed their wounds, renewed their hope, and empowered them. From utter collapse and failure, something totally and utterly new arose. They not only believed in Christ, but they also believed in themselves. What a joy it is to be fully known with all our weaknesses and fully loved at the same time.**

**The early church, those fearful disciples in the upper room, had many challenges. Today our Church throughout the world has many challenges. We live in a post-Christian era – merely being a person of faith has its challenges. Our Diocesan Church faces the challenge of a decreasing number of priests, financial and legal issues, and a shrinking population. We could huddle in a corner and shrink with fear for the future like those early disciples. But I have watched over the past 2 years with the implementation of the Alpha Experience and our embracing of Divine Renovation that the Spirit is very much alive and calling us. The opening line of our Gospel was “The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” In Alpha you “recount what has taken place on the way” in our own lives and how we have encountered the Lord. The Spirit of the Risen Christ is filling us with hope and encouragement – there is a quiet joy among us and a deep sense of peace – the Risen Lord is with us allowing us to radiate God’s love. Like those early disciples we are slowly becoming engaged – taking ownership of our treasured faith. “You are witnesses of these things,” is the last line of Jesus in the gospel today. He says that to us. Tell it. Live it. Become it. The resurrected life is yours. You are witnesses. You are witnesses. Those early disciples did just that and it changed their world. It is much too easy to come here each Sunday. Listen to the gospel, hear, for better or worse, whatever I have to say, and then return to life as usual. Do not let that happen. Your life is too important to let that happen. Become engaged – You are witnesses of the Resurrected Christ. Tell it. Live it. Become it. The resurrected life is yours. “You are witnesses. You are witnesses.”**