Easter 3B: Baptism of twins Ella Rose and Ethan Joseph Zimmermann

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All Saints’, Wolcott

*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.*

It’s time to ‘fess up. Be honest now – for how many of you is Easter over, for this year? Raise your hand.

Every year, attendance at churches all over the world tells the story. Easter Day, the church is packed; the following Sunday (appropriately nicknamed “Low Sunday”), not so much. By the third Sunday (today), the Easter candy is mostly gone, the sugar-high has waned, and things begin to return to whatever constitutes “normal” for each congregation.

What we learn from Holy Scripture, and from all the generations of Christians from the earliest days until now, is that Easter is not a thing of the past – it’s not over on Easter Day or even the second Sunday of Easter. It continues into this Sunday of Easter, right through all fifty days of this liturgical season, “and then on and on,” says Harvey Guthrie, “into a future in which every Sunday is the Lord’s Day, every week an Easter week.”

The final pages of each of the Gospels are full of accounts of the risen Christ appearing to his disciples – accounts in which the disciples either don’t recognize him, or *do* recognize him and are terrified because they think they’re seeing a ghost, as in this morning’s story from the Gospel of Luke, of which we hear today only the closing portion of a remarkable story of Jesus revealing himself to two of his disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus on that first Easter Day. “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets,” Luke says, “he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”[[1]](#footnote-1) When they persuaded him to stay with them that night for supper, he was revealed further: “When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them;”[[2]](#footnote-2) their eyes were opened and they recognized him, whereupon he vanished from their sight and they ran back to Jerusalem to proclaim “the Lord has risen indeed!”[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is at this point that we pick up the story today, which tallies with the accounts we have heard the past two Sundays, from the Gospel of John. Jesus appears among those amazed disciples and speaks those words so important on that first Easter Day and on every day before or since: *Shalom*. “Peace be with you.”

The way Luke tells the story, it seems that Jesus has to go a step further than just showing his friends his wounded hands and feet, and inviting them to touch them. When they are still confused, he takes the next step and asks for something to eat. Don’t you suppose they stood there transfixed, watching this “ghost” down a piece of fish? Do you, after all, ever think about ghosts eating, or even being hungry, for that matter? But eating with his friends is important to Jesus. Think of all the accounts of him eating with tax collectors and sinners, and feeding the five thousand, not to mention that legendary Last Supper. Table companionship seems to have been an essential part of his bringing into being the Kingdom of God.

Jesus then helps the disciples understand the familiar Scriptures that tell the background of their own faith story, and commissions them, as witnesses of his risen presence, to proclaim “to all nations” repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name.

How do we fare, we modern-day disciples? Not really so different, I think. Here we are, gathered together as were those first disciples on the evening of the first Easter Day, conversing with the Risen Lord (some of us still not quite believing, still wondering), hearing the Scriptures read, sharing a meal with him, being commissioned to go out and tell others this Good News: Christ is risen; your sins are forgiven; there is life beyond the grave.

And tell them also that the *fellowship* of Christ is really important! It was important to Jesus, and so it ought to be important to us. Sharing the Scriptures, sharing the Eucharistic meal, sharing the lives of those for whom Jesus died (that’s everyone!), sharing the Risen Christ, is at the foundation of our being as Christians.

It was many years later when the first letter of John was written. But it’s clear that the author had learned the commission Christ had given his disciples on the evening of that first Easter Day. The importance of handing down the tradition, telling the Story of the love of God so strong that death cannot stand against it; telling it so others might learn and benefit from it and tell the Story to others, who would tell the Story to others, who would learn and benefit from it, and so on, down to our own day.

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God,” says the first letter of John. “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” Some ancient copies read “so that *your* joy may be complete.” Whichever it is, the implication is that we’d all be happier if we shared with others the Good News of our Resurrection in Jesus Christ and invited them to share the fellowship which we enjoy.

We are about to welcome into that fellowship Ella Rose and Ethan Joseph Zimmermann. Ella Rose and Ethan Joseph, beloved children of God, you will grow up with a rich heritage of hearing the Scriptures opened to you from both the Jewish and the Christian viewpoints. When you read Jesus’ words in Luke’s account “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled,” those words will carry for you even deeper significance in your life of faith.

Ella Rose and Ethan Joseph, at five and a half months, you are too young to understand the importance of the invitation which has been offered to you, but your parents and your Godparents have accepted it on your behalf, and they and all this family of faith will help you respond to it as you grow up, so that your joy may be complete and you, too, may be added to that long list of witnesses to the healing power of God which is always at work in the world, even when we have a hard time recognizing it.

In the early days of Christianity, Baptism was called “illumination” or “enlightenment,” because it was administered only at the Easter Vigil, when the brightness of the Easter Candle, symbolizing the Light of Christ, so visibly scatters darkness from the surrounding space. The message, as John says in his letter, is that “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.” Those who are Baptized will receive the Light of Christ directly from the Easter Candle.

Ella Rose and Ethan Joseph, the Easter life is yours today. In a few moments, in the waters of the Font, you will join Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. With Jesus, you will rise from those waters – born again for the second time in your short life, and your Baptism will be for us a sign that God still loves this world and is with us always. You will be sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever. You will receive the Light of Christ and join the rest of the Baptized as members of the household of the Body of Christ, and you will be a companion with whom we joyfully break bread and pray together on the Way. Come then to the table, Ella Rose and Ethan Joseph; join in the fellowship of the family of Christ, and feast with us on heavenly food. As you grow in the fellowship of the faith, be witnesses to the wonders of God’s love. In this world, which so often seems driven to violence and division, seek peace - pursue it, practice it, and proclaim it. Let the glory of Easter be known to those around you every day, and let peace and forgiveness be the Light which shines forth from you, dispelling the darkness of sin which seeks to pervade this world.

Then your joy and ours will be complete and the alleluias of Easter will know no end.

1. Luke 24:27 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luke 24:30-31 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 24:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)