

Sermon for Easter 2, Year A
April 16, 2023
The Venerable Patricia Soukup
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

- [Acts 2:14a,22-32](#)
- [1 Peter 1:3-9](#)
- [John 20:19-31](#)
- [Psalm 16](#)

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, o Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

When I was growing up, my family had a cabin near Taos. We would spend several weekends each summer there, and we came to know a number of families who also had summer cabins in the area. One day several of us kids decided to go hiking in the area. We had been hiking for probably an hour or so when we noticed dark clouds beginning to roll in. Suddenly lightening struck not far from us, and we decided that we needed to get back home post-haste. We ran as fast as we could through the woods toward the house, hoping to make it back before the skies opened up. We had taken a short cut on the way home, which saved us quite a bit of time, but there was just one problem; we found ourselves at the property line of a man by the name of Mr. Clark. Mr. Clark was known as a grumpy old man who did not like people trespassing on his property, and he was not shy about making that fact known.

The funny thing was, nobody had actually ever seen Mr. Clark; however, he made his presence known by shouting from his house and firing a gun through the window at people who happened to wander onto his land. Everyone in the area knew about Mr. Clark, and they all steered clear of his property. I think all of us kids had a preconceived notion of what Mr. Clark was like: a big, menacing man with a scowl on his face and daggers shooting from his eyes. Someone who lurked behind the bushes, waiting for an unsuspecting person to set foot on his land. A faceless creature with malice in his heart who was out to get everyone who came near him. In other words, he was a Boggart.

For those of you who are not Harry Potter fans, a Boggart is a shape-shifting creature that will assume the form of whatever most frightens the person who encounters it. J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter books, says that nobody knows what a Boggart looks like if nobody is there to see it, although it continues to exist, usually giving evidence of its presence by rattling, shaking or scratching the object in which it is hiding. Boggarts particularly like confined spaces, but they may also be found lurking in woods and around shadowy corners.

So there we were, faced with two options in dealing with our Boggart: 1), go the long way around to get back home, which would have added probably another ½ mile and 30 minutes to the trek, or 2), cut through Mr. Clark's property and hope that he wouldn't see us. A very loud clap of thunder overhead and large rain drops helped us make up our minds very quickly: we

were about to encounter the Boggart known as Mr. Clark. And we were terrified because we had a collective image that we had conjured up of Mr. Clark, and we didn't like it.

Today's Gospel reading takes place on the evening of that first Easter – the Day of Resurrection. The disciples are still confused and afraid, and they are trying to keep a low profile. They are gathered together in a locked room because they were terrified of who might be lurking on the other side of that door – the Boggarts. This included the Jewish authorities, as well as others whom they may not have trusted.

We find the same Boggarts before us today, don't we? Things that take the shape of our worst fears. The people we don't like. The conversations we would rather avoid. The places we really don't want to go. They're all out there, on the other side of that door. What or who is on the other side for you? What are your Boggarts? We all have them. For the young, growing up and becoming an adult is on the "other side". For those who are middle-aged, retirement may be on the "other side". What will I do, who will I be, if I'm not working? Or major life events such as getting married, getting divorced, facing an operation, or moving to a new city may be on the "other side". For those of financial means, poverty may be on the "other side". The lived experience of people of color or those on the margins of society is on the "other side" for many Americans.

The disciples were not willing to open the door and face the Boggarts on the other side, but the risen Christ appears to them in the midst of their fear and unbelief with a greeting of "Shalom", or deep, abiding peace. And he then says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He knows that they are afraid, and the first thing he does is to instill his abiding peace in them. In fact, he does this a second time a week later, when they are again gathered in the same room. He gives them his abiding peace in order that they will be equipped to step outside their locked doors, literally and figuratively. He sends them out into the world, even though they do not yet know what surprises await them.

As we sprinted across Mr. Clark's property in a driving rain storm, all we wanted was to get to the other side of his property safely and get inside our friend's house before we were struck by lightening. But what happened next was a shocker. As we ran past the side of his house, we heard Mr. Clark's voice shouting out to us. We froze in our tracks, terrified of being shot. But Mr. Clark was not hollering at us to leave his property; he was calling to us to come and help him. Not trusting what we were hearing, we gingerly made our way to where we heard him calling from the back of his property. We just knew that the Boggart was waiting!

But as we approached, we found a small-framed, feeble gentleman kneeling on the ground bending over something. That was when we saw it – it was a small fawn, drenched and too weak to stand. Beside it was the body of its mother, who had been shot illegally by hunters. Mr. Clark was trying to pick up the young deer and bring it inside to tend to it, but he needed help. The teenagers in our group all gathered around, and soon they had the baby animal safely inside Mr. Clark's home. But everyone was afraid – afraid that he would be angry that we had been on his property. But Mr. Clark was not angry. He was relieved. Then he told us that we had helped to save the life of this young creature, and had we not been running across his property when we were, the helpless little thing would probably have died. We could see that Mr. Clark was elderly, and he was not able to move around well. He told us that the reason that

he often fired blanks was to ward off hunters who tried to hunt illegally on his property. The current situation was evidence that he was not the Boggart that we believed him to be.

We all have doors that we don't want to open and places that we don't want to go. But that's precisely where Jesus sends us. The risen Christ calls us to respond in faith rather than to retreat in doubt. He calls us to venture outside the locked doors of our hearts in order that we may experience a change in ourselves and discover that reservoir of hope, that endless supply of peace, courage and grace that enables us to respond in faith and love to those on the outside rather than to react out of fear. We are to reach out to those who call out to us for help, even if we don't know exactly what to do. We have hands and feet to provide food, clothing, and shelter to those who have none. Ours are the hands and feet of Christ in the world. While we may not be able to see what awaits us on the other side of the door, Christ is in there in our midst. And as we do his work in the world, we will be changed by those whom we encounter.

In the weeks following the rescue of the fawn, the other kids and I visited Mr. Clark and the fawn frequently. He let us bottle-feed the baby, and soon it was growing and gaining strength. Although we had to say goodbye to the young deer when it was big enough and strong enough to survive on its own, the other kids and I had established a friendship with Mr. Clark. We learned a lot about this gentleman, and we learned that he really was no different from us. He had moved there and lived alone after his wife died, and he was a hermit. He was also afraid – afraid that he would not be accepted by the community that surrounded him. We did not change Mr. Clark as we came to know him, but he definitely changed us.

The risen Christ comes among us when we are filled with doubt and fear. He offers his deep, abiding peace and invites us to reach out to those on the other side of the locked doors of our hearts: the marginalized, those who are different from us, those whose stories we need to hear, in order for us to recognize—and more fully participate in—the spread of God's reign of justice and peace. Listen again to the words of the Collect for the day: “Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith.”

Amen