Good morning sisters and brothers. I am very happy to be worshipping with you on this Spring morning during the season of Easter.

In our gospel today, Jesus tells the apostles that they are **witnesses**. Likewise, in our first lesson, Peter tells the Israelites that they are witnesses – they "see" and they "know." Witnesses to what? What exactly do they know?

Have you ever imagined yourself in that room with the apostles and other disciples when Jesus himself suddenly appeared? What would be in your heart and your mind? Would you too be frightened and joyful at the same time? Would you cry out when Jesus ate the cooked fish? Would you fall at his feet when he explained the scriptures and how his death and resurrection had fulfilled what was predicted all along? Would it be an experience that changed you – put everything in your life into prospective? Would everything be different? What has been your personal experience of the risen Lord?

I've been thinking about moments in my life that profoundly changed me – moments that caused me to wake up and realize what's truly important; moments that affected the purpose and direction of my life. Some might be obvious.

There was the beautiful day when I married my husband thirty-eight years ago. There were the amazing days when our two children were born. There was the devastating day when my grandfather died – the man who delighted in me and encouraged me from my infancy. There was a day when I was let go from a job and though I had no plans, I knew deep down inside that I was being guided to a better job. There was also a time when I was healed; when I came out of a deep depression into the light of self-acceptance and new possibilities.

Almost eight years ago, I experienced a terrible writer's block at work. I was a non-profit fund raiser charged with writing proposals for charitable grants to support services for disadvantaged children. For weeks, I just couldn't write! Soon I couldn't think straight, read, or concentrate on anything. It felt like my brain had seized up. I was full of dread and at some points panic over carrying out everyday tasks like grocery shopping. I had periods of shaking and sweating and I couldn't sit still for more than a few minutes. I had trouble sleeping at night and I barely ate. I just couldn't do any of the things I normally liked to do. I had nothing but negative thoughts about myself racing through my mind. The psychiatrist I saw tried to find a medication or combination of medications that would help me, but nothing worked.

After months of this, I started feeling ashamed, useless, and worthless. I hid in my house and avoided people. I wouldn't even reach out to my friends. I had no energy and everything felt like a tremendous effort…even brushing my teeth. In my darkest moments I thought about killing myself. I thought that my loved ones would be better off without me – that I was just a burden to them. It was like I had fallen into a deep well. There was no way to climb out and no one could reach me. I was convinced that the life I had known before was gone for good. I couldn't even pray like I used to! I was in a state of despair.

An old friend of mine who happened to be a psychiatrist suggested that a get ECT – electro convulsive shock therapy. I was frightened but I felt I had nothing to lose. After six treatments, I miraculously came out of the dark and back into the light. I could think again and I had some positive thoughts about myself! The more time I spent in talk therapy, the more I realized that God had answered my desperate cries. Nothing had happened by chance – God had led me to ECT and had used it to heal me.

This was a transforming experience. I felt a kind of joy that I had never known before. God had been with me the whole time! God had restored my life. I was deeply loved and able to put my energies into loving others. There was new purpose in my life. I discovered a call to prison ministry and I was certain that was where I was meant to be. There was conviction behind my commitment. I "saw" and I "knew." The next step was to witness – to go forth and testify to God's desire and power to heal.

Now I think there are two ways that people can witness – there is being a passive witness or being an active witness. A passive witness simply gives an account of what he/she has seen – like a person telling the police about a car accident that happened on the road in front of them. On the other hand, an active witness is affected by what he/she has seen – is changed in some way and compelled not only to share the news but to live it. Think about a child who witnesses a parent taking in a neighbor who has lost her house in a fire. Most likely that child will someday imitate the generosity he/she has seen. Witnessing the action has power.

A Jesuit priest named Walter Ciszek wrote,
"For the resurrection was a fact, a fact as certain and as sure as death itself, and it meant that death held no victory over men, that life beyond death is a certainty and not just a human hope or fable. This was the fact that made new men of his once fearful disciples; this was the 'good news' they preached…This is the joy of Easter; this is the peace that it brings."

A Greek word for "witness" is martyr. Being a martyr originally meant being a person who had seen something and could testify to the facts of the case. This term

was first applied to the apostles who had witnessed Christ's life and resurrection. Later, martyr was used to describe those who, arrested and on trial, admitted to being Christians. These early Christians were often killed as a consequence of their witness and the term martyr came to denote one who witnesses to beliefs by dying for them.

The early disciples of Christ bore active witness to his resurrection. In our first lesson today, we have the account of Peter healing a crippled beggar and making clear to the crowd that the man's restoration is the result of faith in Jesus' name. The apostles witnessed by imitating the actions of Jesus without concern for the consequences. They embodied the story and didn't worry about the cost.

We have not seen the risen Christ with our own eyes or felt his wounds with our hands, but we have experienced him in our lives. I experienced his saving love when he rescued me from despair. It is my responsibility to tell the story as I have experienced it, and to do so at cost if need be.

As I asked earlier, what exactly are we to tell? The message is deep and hopeful and everyone has to tell it in his/her own way. Good comes out of suffering. Death is followed by rebirth. Pain is followed by joy. There is no greater joy than that of giving to others. Light will always overcome darkness. Love has tremendous power. God is about forgiveness and fresh starts. Peace will prevail. God's good gifts will never be exhausted.

Think about how desperately our world needs to hear this message – over and over. Despite the violence, injustice, corruption, and poverty, God's Kingdom will prevail. We have known the love of Jesus. And, he has assured us that we need not be troubled. Our task is to share the joy. Let us remember that we are witnesses to the meaning of Jesus' life and death. It is both our responsibility and our privilege.

Amen