

3 Easter Luke 24:36b-48
Christ and Grace April 15, 2018
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It's been two weeks since Easter, and we are not unlike those first disciples, wondering about the things we've heard, and wrestling with the question, "What does all of this mean?" Today we hear a slightly different story than last week when Thomas was doubting. We may also be wondering, "What does today's Gospel have to do with us? Is this just a story from long ago, or does it have meaning for us now? Could it profoundly change our lives?"

Luke tells us that the disciples were startled, terrified, afraid, and doubtful. That's understandable because no one then and no one now really knows how to "explain" the Resurrection. The disciples – then and now - can only try to describe a personal experience of it. This, by the way, is why the Gospels are not identical – each one is the author's personal experience. So, perhaps rather than attempting to explain the Resurrection, we could learn from Jesus what it means to live a resurrected life.

We have some sense of what the disciples were like, and how they were feeling. But what was Jesus like? Apparently, not like anything they had ever seen before! On the one hand, locked doors didn't keep him out, but on the other hand, he could still eat some broiled fish like the disciples, which was a very human action. Things were different, and yet somehow still the same.

Jesus continues to prepare them for their mission, and though he's been working on this all along, they are still not quite ready. They need something more. Their eyes need to be opened; their hearts need to be opened: they are in need of transformation.

Encountering the risen Jesus would be powerful and transforming enough, yet once he's done the very human thing of eating the fish, Jesus engages the disciples in a Bible study. Surely then they remembered what they had experienced with Jesus – healing the sick, feeding the 5,000, breaking bread at the Last Supper, and now the risen Jesus eating fish. Combining what they had experienced with the word of God, the disciples began to make some sense of "all of this."

This passage describes the very earliest Christians hearing and doing the very same things that 21st-century Christians do: doubting, questioning, fearing, but also feeding and being fed, listening for and receiving God's call, and, of course, like any good church community, studying the scriptures.

What does this mean for us? How might these practices profoundly change each of our own lives? As we hear this Gospel story today, can we hear that we, as the Church, are the body of Christ, and we are called to proclaim our experiences of the risen Jesus – however different each of our experiences may be.

Trying to make sense of it all is easier when we do it in a community where we can share our experiences and our questions. And it is not insignificant that Jesus includes table fellowship

when he appears to the disciples, because it's still at the core of our story and at the center of who we are as a Eucharistic community.

The experience of the early disciples who touched Jesus, put their hands in his wounds and heard his voice, fed him when he was hungry, and received his blessing, is the experience of Christians today who feed the hungry, break bread together, hunger for God's blessing, and respond to the call to turn our lives toward God again and again.

This past Wednesday I went to the Hope Center with some of our parishioners to serve lunch to people who were hungry. I didn't know what life circumstances brought them there in need of a meal, but it didn't matter. They were hungry and we fed them, men, women, and children. They were people just like us, who loved lasagna, tried the salad even if they weren't sure, and delighted in an ice cream sandwich. I was struck by how simple it was to feed people who are hungry, and most of all by the way the presence of the risen Christ stood among us. If you have not yet helped with this ministry I encourage you to join us.

Because of the Resurrection, everything is different. This change, this resurrected life, isn't something that happens completely and all at once, for the disciples or for us. It happens little by little, experience by experience- when we are doubting, when we are believing; when we are feeding others or when we are being fed ourselves. When we live into the Resurrection we will experience moments, however brief, of increasing faith and holy presence.

As I was thinking this week about transformation and living a resurrected life, I came across a video of a woman who helps homeless people get back on their feet. Every week she sets up a stall at a church and tends to the feet of the homeless, using her skill as a podiatrist. She found it heartbreaking to see the condition of their feet – sometimes bleeding, wearing soaking wet socks, and shoes full of holes. One of them said to her, “I can't believe that you do this for us.” After a pedicure they receive new socks and shoes. The video ends as she says, “We're all gifted and if everyone used their gift wherever they are the world would be a better place, wouldn't it?” She transforms lives by caring for feet, but this video continues transforming all who see it, opening hearts and minds to what it can look like to live in the light of Christ.

The risen Jesus enters our lives and stands among us with wounded hands and feet, not only when we are doubtful or afraid, but also when we're jaded and critical and judgmental and closed-off in heart and mind. The power of experiencing the risen Jesus enabled the early Christians to endure persecution and trials, and it enables us to step out, not in fear but with faith, to offer God's love and transformation to everyone who longs for a resurrected life. The risen Christ stands among us, continuing to profoundly change our lives as we move from the meal that we share together at the Lord's table here, out into the world to feed all of God's children who hunger for righteousness and peace.¹ Amen.

¹ I am indebted to Kathryn Matthews for her thoughts and inspiration on this passage.
http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_april_15_2018

Video

<https://www.facebook.com/BBCSouthNews/videos/1691588284265088/UzpfSTYwMTk5NjgxODoxMDE1NTU2MzY4NDU5MTgxOQ/>