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April 14, 2024
Luke 24:36-48
Embodied

We pick up the story in Luke 24:

While they - that is the disciples - were talking about what had happened, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "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." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Startled... disbelieving...full of wonder...joyful... a witness of these amazing things. These are descriptors of the disciples as Jesus appeared to them in Jerusalem that day. And some of the same emotions people felt when viewing the solar eclipse this week. Brian and I had experienced the totality of the solar eclipse of 2017 while living in South Carolina. We drove two hours or so inland from the coast where we were living to Orangeburg, SC. As we waited for the eclipse on that hot (very hot!), sunny August day, we wondered if it would be worth the wait. And when the moon completely covered the sun and the stars emerged, we knew we had witnessed an amazing thing. So when we realized that we were yet again living just two hours or so from the path of the total eclipse, we knew we had to experience it again.

So there we were on Monday traveling to Bowling Green State University, the location we decided would be our viewing spot while we were enroute (thank you Google!), excited and expectant. We had attended a program at Abrams Planetarium two weeks ago to prepare ourselves. I had found buried on my phone my pictures from 2017 to get us mentally prepared. We had a full tank of gas, three pairs of eclipse glasses (just in case one pair had a scratch), a picnic spread and a slew of crossword puzzles in case the electrical grid failed and we needed something for entertainment or to start a fire. With the timing precisely programmed on our phones, we were ready! And yet I wasn't. I watched as the sun appeared to shrink, the cookie monster taking a little nibble and then a bigger bite and eventually just a thin crescent left.

Then it happened, the final sparkle – the diamond ring – as it is affectionately called- and the sun disappeared. The streetlights came on and the stars came out. The temperature dropped. We took off our glasses. The sky was eerie. And I was startled... disbelieving...full of wonder...joyful... a witness of these amazing things. Again. I was prepared – I was ready. I knew what to expect and, yet I wasn't anywhere near ready for that moment. That moment of awe when the world was so different than it was just a moment before. And that is where we find the disciples today.

It has been a long day, so I can't fault the disciples for being startled and terrified and thinking they were seeing a ghost when Jesus appeared in their midst. You see early that same day, at dawn, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried and found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Yes - it was just that morning when the men in dazzling clothes asked the women: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?", saying "Remember how Jesus told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to the hands of sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again."

I can easily put myself in the disciples' shoes Really - it was just some hours ago that the women told us this news, news that was so astonishing that Peter had to go see for himself. If that was not unsettling enough, Cleopas was telling us about encountering Jesus on the road to Emmaus - how this man had walked with them, interpreting scripture beginning with Moses and all the prophets. They invited this man to join them for a meal. And then their eyes were opened and they recognized it was Jesus when he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. But then Cleopas said that Jesus disappeared and they came back to Jerusalem to tell us about what had happened. Yes - it had been a long day and now Jesus reappears to us as we are trying to process what has happened. So don't be too hard on us for thinking that Jesus was a ghost. Yes – it had been a long day.

The scriptures for the season of Easter have a flow to them. The gospel readings for the first weeks of the season focus on stories of the risen Jesus appearing to his followers and the final weeks of Easter explore Jesus' teachings about relationships with God. As one commentator has noted "the implication of this order isn't just about the astonishing "wow!" of Jesus' rising; it's also — and preeminently — about the equally astonishing invitation for human beings to rise into greater intimacy and life together with God." ¹ We are at a flexion point this morning – there is the astonishing "wow" moment and there is an astonishing invitation to a deeper life of faith.

I think Jesus appreciated the challenges facing the disciples on that day, as well as the challenges facing disciples throughout time. The tomb was empty. Yes, before he was

¹ Touch. Salt's Lectionary Commentary for Easter 3. The Salt Project. <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2018/4/10/faith-and-doubt-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-easter-3>

crucified, Jesus had told the disciples that he would die and rise from the dead. But they didn't really get it – didn't really understand the significance of these words. So the gospel writer Luke tells us that Jesus **opened** the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day. The words Jesus spoke mattered. And Jesus also recognized that more than words were needed for the disciples (and for us) to become witnesses who proclaim the good news.

The disciples needed an embodied faith. As I shared with the children, and we sang in our last hymn, an embodied faith moves us. The disciples needed to let go of what they thought they knew so surely – Jesus had died and was buried in the tomb. They needed to question. Who was this person who had joined them? It must be a ghost. It was easier for the disciples brain's to believe that the Jesus sitting with them was a ghost than it was for them to grasp that their friend, whom they had seen die, was sitting with them. They needed some time to process that moment of awe when the world was so different than it was just a moment before.

As commentators have noted, "A recurring theme in the resurrection appearance stories is how early Christian communities struggle to perceive and believe. Jesus has come back, but only a few have eyes to see; even his disciples need help recognizing him." So Jesus says, "Touch me and see", directly addressing fears and doubts of the disciples. "Luke frames Jesus' act of showing his wounds as not only an act of demonstrating who he is (... I'm the one you saw crucified") but also an act of demonstrating his physicality (.. I'm a human being, not an ethereal spirit").²

Jesus not only says to touch him – but when, for all their joy, the disciples were still disbelieving, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" The disciples gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Talk about an embodied Jesus! As we heard during this past Lenten season, in Luke's Gospel, much of Jesus' ministry took place around the table. Meals – simple and elegant - were the places where the kingdom of heaven was manifest. Where all were welcomed and fed – the gift of hospitality was shared. Where eyes were opened to recognize Christ in the breaking of the bread. These were not hypothetical meals. These were not metaphorical meals. These were real people gathering around a real table, raising real hands in blessing, breaking real bread, eating real fish. It was embodied ministry.

When Christ ascends to heaven, he will call the disciples (and us) to be his body on earth – the church. Jesus wants us to understand this is not just theoretical ministry, not just hypothetical ministry, this is real flesh and blood, skin in the game, embodied ministry. If the disciples thought following Jesus as he ministered in Galilee, and as they journeyed to Jerusalem, and he challenged the authorities in Jerusalem was hard, embodying Jesus' ministry would require a whole new level of faith and trust. Jesus recognizes the emotional toll this work will take –

² [ibid](#)

recognizes the fears the disciples may be experiencing in his opening words to them: “peace be with you.”

“Peace be with you.” These were words of hope and encouragement. These were words to dispel the fears and uncertainty the disciples were facing. And they were marching orders for the disciples to offer that same hope and encouragement as they spread the love and grace of Jesus Christ. They are marching orders for us. Each Sunday we end of our prayer of confession by saying that as a forgiven people we extend the peace of Christ - “the peace of Christ be with you.” This is Christ embodied. These are words of hope and encouragement. “Peace be with you.”

Peace be with you as you encounter a world where it is so much easier to live with a sense of despair than hope; where violence is surrounding you; where divisions amongst peoples are a badge of honor; where it is not enough to win – the other also has to lose. The disciples were living in this kind of world. They needed courage to go back out into a society where their teacher and friend had just been arrested, tried, convicted, and executed for spreading a message of love. They needed courage to respond in faith – to respond with an embodied faith. A faith that matured – as we sang – “by reaching out, stretching minds, enlarging hearts, sharing struggles, living prayer, binding up the broken parts.”³

Sharing struggles...Binding up the broken parts. That is what it means when we say “the peace of Christ be with you.” It means that we know all of our lives have difficult times. And we want to walk with you in those times, holding your hand, holding you up. It means that we trust you enough to share our struggles with you. To not pretend that everything is perfect in our lives, when it is not.

To share the “peace of Christ” means we know that there is too much – way too much injustice in this world. Too many broken parts. We need to stretch our minds and enlarge our hearts so that shalom and harmony exist everywhere. We need to embody Christ to the world. Yesterday we partnered with First Presbyterian Church, Lansing and the Reachout Christian Center to host a Gun Violence Prevention Summit. We were challenged by the Rev. Margery Rossi, of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, to move beyond expressing our thoughts and prayers – as important as that action is – to embody God’s love for each other. She charged us to choose one avenue – practical, pastoral, or prophetic and engage in action. Get involved in program that addresses root causes of violence; be a healing presence for someone who has experienced gun violence; speak out about legislation that works to bring the peace of Christ to the world. Christ says, “Touch me and see.” Touch me and see that I am the Living Christ. Touch me and be my witnesses to world. Touch me so that you can be my body in the world, embodying my love and grace. May it be so. Amen. Join me in prayer.

³ Daw, Carl P. Jr. *Faith Begins by Letting Go*. Hymn #684 *Glory to God Hymnal*; Westminster John Knox Press, 2016