

Third Sunday of Easter April 18 2021

Luke 24:36b-48

This week's lesson feels a bit like Deja-vu. Jesus suddenly showing up among the disbelieving disciples. Now, Luke's story is a bit different than John's. The disciples are not fully locked away in fear. In Luke, Peter has gone to see the empty tomb but does not know what it means. In the section just prior to this Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Finally becoming apparent to them in the breaking of the bread. These two rush back to the other disciples and are talking with them about their experience with Jesus and then... Jesus stands among them.

What are Jesus' first words to them? These grieving, confused, emotionally exhausted disciples? "Peace be with you." The word for peace in Hebrew would have been Shalom. It means more than a lack of conflict. It means something like wholeness, completeness, quietness within yourself. Jesus' first action is to do what he has always done- minister to the needs of those around him. "Peace, wholeness, quietness be with you." A desire for their grieving to be comforted, their confusion lifted, for them to be emotionally calm.

Then, Luke bears witness to the fact that Jesus was bodily resurrected. That this was no ghost or purely spiritual body before them. Hence Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish (this is similar to the story in Mark where Jesus raises the leader of the synagogue's daughter from the dead and tells them to give her something to eat). After all, ghosts don't eat food. Jesus makes

a big show of having flesh and bones and invites the disciples to touch him and see that he is really there. In the flesh.

What is it about this embodied-ness that is so important? Unlike many religions- we as Christians do not abandon the body. The body is not a second-class citizen to the soul. Rather- we believe that our fleshiness is part of what God created and that the whole of who we are is made up of flesh and spirit, body and soul. And that this whole is declared by God to be good. God cares about our physical well-being as well as our spiritual well-being.

This is evident in the resurrection of Jesus but also in the life of Jesus. The ministry of Jesus was one that focused on healing bodies, feeding bodies, casting out demons to give people autonomy over their bodies again. It was about making bodies whole- giving bodies shalom- even as he taught them and sought to bring peace to their souls as well.

To this we are witnesses- that God cares about our physical as well as spiritual well-being and wholeness. Bodies matter to God. We are also witnesses to the fact that God has power over anything that would threaten our souls or our bodies. God resurrect, redeems not just our soul, but our bodies as well.

This care for the body is evident in the witness of the disciples and the early church. Peter in our reading from Acts is addressing those who are wondering at his healing of the man born lame. When they came across this man who asked them for alms, Peter told him, "I have no silver or gold,

but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!” Peter bore witness to the mission of God to heal bodies.

The early church bore witness to the bodily resurrection of Jesus and God’s care for human bodies by caring for widows and orphans- the most vulnerable in society. The early church was known for how they fed, clothed, and sheltered those in need. This bore witness to God’s care for the physical needs of God’s beloved creation as well as the spiritual needs.

We are witnesses to these things, too. In our own lives and actions. When we speak out for things that bring healing and wholeness to people’s bodies. When we speak and act in protest to ways bodies are abused, neglected, and discarded because of their gender, their race, their sexual orientation, their religious affiliation, their vocation, their age. We witness to this when we feed hungry bodies, when we clothe naked bodies, when we shelter bodies that have no place to lay their head.

A witness is one who both sees and tells what they see. It’s not something you need any training to do. In fact it is something we do every day! We tell the story of the book we are reading, of the video we just saw, of the crazy thing our next-door neighbor just did. A witness recounts what they have seen and known. And from Christ’s own resurrection, we have seen and known the care God has for the wholeness of who we are, including our bodies.

We witness to this in baptism. A washing of the whole of who we are. A re-creating not just of the soul but the body as well. For this is the moment

we can point to with absolute clarity and declare that in this here we see what love God has for us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. For God in love has claimed us in these waters. The wholeness of who we are. Body and soul with all of its imperfections, foibles, weaknesses, strengths, gifts, and powers. This is what God claims and redeems- us. In the fullness of who we are.

And this is our hope made visible in Jesus, that the God who has claimed us in love can resurrect the whole of who we are even from death. This is the strength that we have because of the promise of our own physical resurrection. And that promise invites us to have the courage to live our lives as witnesses to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Because we know that death will come for us all. This does not mean we are cavalier about death, instead it frees us to be caring towards others, to sacrifice for them and put their physical needs ahead of our own. We see this in Paul's letter to the Galatians and our freedom to serve our neighbors in love. We see this in Luther's explanation of the 5th commandment- you shall not murder- we are to fear and love God so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs.

Friends in Christ- as we the disciples of Jesus gather together this morning, on the first day of the week to remember the truth of his resurrection, may we also remember that our bodies are good, because God has declared them as such. Not because we weigh a certain amount, or dress a certain way, or eat a particular diet. We, as creations of God, are good because God made us, and God loves us. Period.

We give thanks to God for the waters of baptism in which God claimed us as God's children. We give thanks for Nicholas and his parents for this visible reminder of our own claiming by God and for the reminder that God loves the fullness of who we are- body and soul. May he know that truth this day deep in that God created body.

On this day- as the sun has risen- may you receive what you need. If you are grieving or confused, if you are angry or upset, if you are without hope and despairing... peace be with you. The peace of Christ which is greater than anything we can imagine.

And filled with that peace, claimed by God as children through baptism, and strengthened by the hope of the promised resurrection, may we go forth as witnesses to God's creative and redeeming power by serving the needs of our neighbors.