

FORGET ME NOT
Luke 24:36b-48
April 8, 2018
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⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”⁷ ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ 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.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ 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.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah⁴ is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses⁵ of these things. Luke 24:36b-48

Our gospel lesson recounts the third time Jesus appears to his disciples. The appearance of the risen Jesus from the Emmaus story immediately precedes it. One week after Easter, we're much like the earliest disciples, wondering about the things we've heard, and wrestling with the question, "What does this mean?" We're probably also wondering, deep in our hearts, "What could all of this mean in my life? Is this just a story from long ago, or does it mean something important to me? Could it profoundly change my life?"

Luke tells us, the disciples were frightened, confused and filled with questions. Maybe they were burdened by doubts and disbeliefs as we are. Their heads and their hearts both needed help sharing the experience of the Resurrection

No one then and no one now really know how to "explain" the Resurrection, so the disciples long ago--and we can only try to describe a personal experience of it. When we read the story of the two disciples whose eyes kept them from recognizing him on the road to Emmaus (even though their hearts were mysteriously burning as he spoke), followed by this picture of a growing little community of questioning, wondering believers, we're reading about ourselves, too.

The week before Easter, I had the privilege to share Bible Times with our nursery school classes. I shared the story of Easter and the miracle of the resurrection. Shortly after our time together as

I was working on something in the Christian Education Office I hear a voice from across the hall, of a 4 year old ask, "What is a miracle?" I listened for a moment to see if the teachers would answer and knew I could not let that opportunity to help them begin to answer this question of life and faith. I went to the class and I spoke of miracles that I have seen. Actually, I was praying that I my words might convey an understanding of my heart even though it was imperfect. I was a bit frightened, much like those disciples who were experiencing first-hand the miracle of Jesus in their midst.

No one then and no one now truly knows how to "explain" the Resurrection, so the disciples long ago--and we, in our own day--can only try to describe a personal experience of it. When we read the story of the two disciples whose eyes kept them from recognizing him on the road to Emmaus (even though their hearts were mysteriously burning as he spoke), followed by this picture of a growing little community of questioning, wondering believers, we're reading about ourselves recounting this resurrection of Jesus.

The passage speaks of an offer of peace, a request for food, a blessing and a commissioning; the disciples experienced Jesus' presence as "mysterious but real. These earliest Christians are hearing and doing the very same things that 21st-century Christians do: journeying, questioning, fearing, but also feeding and being fed, listening for and receiving God's call, and, of course, like any good church community, doing Bible study.

Jesus appeared before them 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 solid food, just like them. Jesus was different, and yet somehow still the same. Time is short, and there's so much to do, as the disciples are about to begin something new. Jesus must prepare them for their mission not just to the people of Israel but to the entire world. He's been working on this for some time, but they're clearly not quite ready. Their eyes and hearts still need to be opened; they are in need of transformation.

The combination of seeing Jesus, of being with him, and the sharing of the Word together, opened the disciples' hearts and minds. So how are we transformed when we only hear this story? Whenever and wherever the light of the gospel shines on our lives, our hearts and minds open to something new. Everything is different because of the events of Easter and not just on Easter Sunday. Cynthia Lindner reminds us that "new life never slips in the back door quietly or painlessly." The sorrow and shock that immobilized and confused the disciples is changed. Isn't that what repentance is? Isn't that what transformation feels like? Nothing ever is quite the same, including us. We know personally how much we hate the disruption of change.

Lindner says, this doesn't have to be (and isn't often) something that happens completely and all at once, for us or for the disciples long ago. Instead, change happens "by fits and starts, in hours of doubt and moments of exhilaration, with days of numbness and mourning punctuated by brief moments of holy presence and powerful certainty." This, she writes, is "good news" for our lives,

even in the "spaces and places" where resurrection may seem most unexpected (The Christian Century, April 21 2009).

When I think about transformation, about eyes and hearts opened to understanding things that formerly we were closed to, I'm reminded of the powerful experience of watching the YouTube video of a Scottish woman, humble but hopeful, on a talent show several years ago. Susan Boyle stunned a disbelieving crowd that had already judged her undeserving of their affirmation because of worldly standards that determine how a "star" should look and speak. Three notes into her song, however, there was a mass transformation of the crowd, their hearts moved by her exceptional voice, completely unexpected from an unknown woman from a small village.

Their (our) "categories" didn't work anymore, the labels and the predictable reactions--judgments, really--that sometimes fuel audiences on such shows. On a dime, in the time it takes to say the word "but," the crowd pivoted from cynicism and disbelief to wholehearted support, embracing this woman and her dreams. Millions around the world joined them, not able to explain what happens in their hearts and minds as they watch this unfold, over and over again.

How do we encounter one another? It's been asked, legitimately, if the unkind attitude of the crowd would have been somehow justified if her voice had turned out not to have been so beautiful (of course not). Still, it's also worth reflecting on how we encounter one another in our bodies with their talents and gifts, and their appearances, too. The goodness of this woman's gifts, given by God, made her radiantly beautiful in the eyes of those who watched and listened. But the transformation was of their hearts and minds, not of her, for she left the stage the same beautiful woman who had walked out onto it, claiming her dream of being a great musical star.

"But," now, they had hearts and eyes open to see that loveliness. The risen Jesus enters our lives and turns us around, when we're jaded and critical and judgmental and closed-off in heart and mind. On a dime, as quickly as you can say the word "but," everything is different. It moves one to tears. Folks that is transformation, that is resurrection!

Rev. Lee Hall Moses shares this resurrection story.

On January 8, 2011, the Tucson shooting that targeted Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, left six people dead. One week later, as thousands mourned and prayed President Obama gave an update on the status of Congresswoman Giffords, who was clinging to life at a nearby hospital. For the first time since the shooting that she had opened her eyes. The crowd cheered, a release after days of grief and the relief at having even some small good news to celebrate. While the cheers went on, the president repeated three times "Gabby opened her eyes for the first time." It wasn't just the movement of skin and tissue he was talking about. It was the news that she was awake to the world around her, that--even though the road to recovery lay long and rocky before her--she had stepped out of the darkness that had surrounded her for so many days and blinked her eyes in the light. Here was this very visible, tangible sign that life had won. Sometimes, though, if we are honest, that breaking open means not just rejoicing in the triumph of life, but also opening our eyes to the broken places in our world. It occurs to me that when Gabrielle Giffords opened her eyes on that January day in Arizona, she wasn't just coming back to life. She

was also opening her eyes to the terrible truth that while *she* had come back from the precipice of life and death and opened her eyes into the light, others had not. Living with eyes opened means recognizing that this place we live in is a place that is sometimes as filled with pain and grief as it is with life and love. The church becomes the place where those truths are broken open, too. With eyes open, we can see that there is too much injustice in the world, too much pain, we can see that there are too many hungry and too many left out in the cold, too many strangers still not welcome at the table. The church at its best lives in the midst of those hard truths, challenges the powers that threaten to pull us into darkness, and offers transformation with little glimpses of the light.

Jesus says, “You are my witnesses to these things.” So followers of the risen Christ, where are you, a week after Easter? Are you hidden in a room with the door shut or are you sharing the light of the gospel story. The power of experiencing the risen Jesus enabled the early Christians to endure pain, injustices and even death, and it enables us to step out in faith in response to the still speaking God who saves, sends, and blesses us. As those who are called to be Christ Witnesses to these things, to never forget the transforming powers of the risen Christ let us stand and proclaim the testimony of our resurrection faith in this modern affirmation.

Pastor:

Where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is the one true church, apostolic and universal,
whose holy faith let us now declare:

Pastor and People:

We believe in God the Father,
infinite in wisdom, power, and love,
whose mercy is over all his works,
and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.
We believe in Jesus Christ,
Son of God and Son of man,
the gift of the Father's unfailing grace,
the ground of our hope,
and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.
We believe in the Holy Spirit
as the divine presence in our lives,
whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance
of the truth of Christ,
and find strength and help in time of need.
We believe that this faith should manifest itself
in the service of love
as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord,
to the end
that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.