

April 15, 2018 Third Sunday in Easter
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GOSPEL

Luke 24:36b-48

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the twenty-fourth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

^{36b}Jesus himself stood among [the disciples] and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look 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.” ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

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

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Luke’s Easter is an action packed day. As far as we can tell...all these amazing events are happening one right after the other. The women find two messengers announcing the resurrection at the tomb; the two disciples are walking away toward Emmaus where they fail to recognize Jesus when he joins them on the road...until he breaks bread with them; they rush back to Jerusalem to the eleven to tell them about it...but apparently Simon has also

seen Jesus in the meantime; then, in the middle of all the commotion that very night Jesus appears among them all with the greeting, "Peace be with you." All on Easter day. It may feel like it's been weeks, but would you believe only a day has passed...?

So much has happened in that time. It seems like Jesus is everywhere at once...and yet...a prevailing theme is that Jesus is everywhere, and his disciples haven't recognized him or believed the news. The men thought the women were telling stories. The two on the road didn't know him even after hours of Bible study, like they must have done so many times when he was alive. And even after the third time Jesus has appeared...they aren't sure they can believe it...and they are still so afraid.

Maybe their fear is more forgivable when we realize how much longer we have had to come to grips with what has happened. So, even when he is standing there with them all...in the flesh...that night, they are unsure. They are still unable to bring themselves to believe, and so Jesus has to go to almost comical lengths to prove he is really there...that he isn't a ghost...showing them his body and even eating fish in front of them... and teaching them...yet again...how he is the expression of the prophets hopes and dreams and God's plan from the very moment of creation...Then he finishes his teaching with a statement, "You are witnesses of these things."

The disciples are unable to bring themselves to believe. But...isn't that the nature of faith? It is something to which we are brought...in the arms of those who may have carried us to the waters of baptism...in the words of our teachers and the witnesses who came before who told stories of where Jesus came to meet *them*...in the bread and wine they bring the mystery of Christ's presence into our very bodies and breath...in the One who comes into our midst and says "Peace." We don't bring ourselves to believe. We are brought. Brought by those with the patience of Christ, including Christ himself...who holds out his hands to let his friends scrutinize him...who asks for a bite of fish to eat to show he's not a ghost...who repeats himself again and again...teaching us what he has been teaching us from the beginning of time...and which we are always needing to learn new.

More than anything, the first and last words Jesus speaks today, strike me, though. "Peace be with you," is the first thing he says when he arrives. He senses their fear, and offers peace. Luke's gospel is especially concerned with peace...with the fullness and wholeness and shalom of the kin-dom coming into the world. He uses the word twice as often as any other gospel writer does. Simeon sings how he can depart life in peace after seeing the Messiah, when the baby Jesus is presented at the temple. Jesus tells those he heals to "go in peace." And today, he tells the disciples they don't need to be afraid, and wishes them peace.

It makes me wonder. What if the opposite of fear isn't courage? What if it is peace? How would that change our response to the things we are inclined to fear? Instead of fear, Christ offers peace. Maybe courage is something that can be planted in the soil of peace and grow...But maybe any courage that isn't rooted in peace cannot really be courage.

I wonder what kind of peaceful courage could answer the fears in the world and our own lives today.

I wonder how the assurance of Jesus' real presence can encourage us today.

Because this is the good news we hear from this day of resurrection. It is overflowing with the unexpected, incomprehensible, really real presence of Jesus.

Jesus is really real. Jesus is the fulfillment of our hopes and all of God's plans.

And these things are not revealed to us like a sort of magic show...or so we can ace heaven's entrance exam about the prophets and Moses...no. But these things are revealed to us for a reason.

And that is where the other words of Jesus that strike me most today come in. The purpose of this revelation is shown in Jesus' final statement to the disciples that we hear today: "You are witnesses of these things."

Jesus reveals himself to us so we will know he has risen *for* us and returned *to* us, certainly...and there is more than that. Because Jesus reveals himself to us and makes us witnesses.

It is an interesting thing. I don't think witnesses necessarily set out to be witnesses. If you are at a certain place at a certain time when something important happens, you become a witness...whether you wanted to be or not.

Witnesses are just there when something important happens...but they are made a part of it, simply by having seen it.

It can be overwhelming to be a witness. It can be hard or frightening to do anything about it. Swearing in court to tell the truth, and face potential scrutiny...even just reporting something you saw or heard...knowing all you have to back it up is your word that it happened. Maybe you've been a witness in that way before. That actually happened at our house last week...when Bailey came home from school one day. I asked how she was, and she said, "Not good. I just saw someone get attacked and knocked unconscious on the way home from school." She was so upset even describing what she'd seen...and she was mostly worried about the young man who had been hurt, because someone had helped him walk away, but he still looked really hurt and she didn't know where he had been taken. She also had heard someone else say they would call 911, but wasn't sure anyone had done it. In the end, we went back and called 911 ourselves, and she told her story. It was hard to go back there, I think, and hard to repeat again the things she had seen...partly because it was so emotionally taxing to relive the experience – even just as a witness...and partly because it feels so vulnerable to tell your story...to offer it over to authorities...It's hard to explain the feeling of wondering if you'll be believed, if you're doing the right thing. It's often intimidating to go to talk to those in power, even when you know you haven't done anything wrong.

Bailey decided to do what she thought was right...what she thought might help a person who was hurt...and I don't know for sure...but I think testifying to what she had seen felt like an important thing to do, as a witness, and helped her move forward from the experience.

The work of witnesses is to testify. Witnesses are maybe just going about their daily lives...and then get swept into something they never planned on. Witnesses are how the news spreads. Witnesses keep the story alive.

Testimony doesn't have to be grand and public, all the time, either. It isn't always in a courtroom, or addressing someone in power, or with a sandwich board on a busy street corner. It can start so small...telling one person you love and trust what you have found to be true...We all testify in our own ways and in our own time...and all that testimony is part of the great telling...the great telling of what we have heard and seen and touched and tasted...what we have witnessed.

Jesus is really real. He's really alive. He's really the fulfillment of all our hopes and all God's plans. And he has made us witnesses so we can testify to these things.

May you grow in courage, planted in the soil of peace, to overcome fear and proclaim the good news of God. Amen.