

EASTER THREE, YEAR B, APRIL 14, 2024

During the Easter season we read a lot of post resurrection stories about Jesus in the Gospels. Today is no exception and this story is chock full of meaning. In today's story the disciples are still trying to figure out what happened and what resurrection meant them and how they should respond. When Jesus appeared to them they are startled and think he is a ghost. He tries to calm them by saying to them peace be with and then he tells them to look at his hands and his feet. When they still can't comprehend it's Jesus, he asks them for something to eat. They give him some fish which he eats then tells them they are to be witnesses of all these things.

A lot is going on in these verses. We often concentrate on Jesus asking for something to eat. After all much of Jesus' ministry focused on eating with all the rejects of his society which defined his ministry of compassion, forgiveness, peace and hope. At this juncture his asking them for food is turning the tables and telling them this is what they need to be doing – feeding others.

However, one aspect of this post resurrection appearance that we do not focus on very often is Jesus showing them his wounds in his hands and his feet. It's easy to gloss over this detail, but again, consider its strangeness. The first thing he tells his disciples how to identify him is by looking at his hands and feet that bear the marks of his crucifixion. I'm sure it's not what the disciples wanted to focus on. Rather it was something they would prefer to forget as this is not how they wanted to recognize him.

What's so remarkable about this is that he chooses the most revealing aspect of himself to share first. As I said, his hands and feet obviously bear unmistakable signs of his crucifixion, his defeat, and his vulnerability. It's as if he is saying, "Here is how you can recognize me by my hands and my feet that have scars. I am alive to pain, just as you are. I am not immune; I am real. This is my history.

Luke wants us to know that the Easter Jesus is not resurrected in shiny perfection without scars or bruises. He does not leave behind the suffering he has known, the pain and the violence he has experienced. Rather he brings the marks of those things with him. They are part of him and part of the resurrected life. This is how he is to be recognized. As we think about the possibility of resurrection in our own lives we have to understand that whatever it looks like, it involves all of who we are. Not only the good, but also the bad. Not only our joys, but also our sorrows. And I'm not just talking about resurrection after death. There are many resurrections that people experience in their lifetime. All of our sorrows and joys have a place in what I call resurrected life. What do I mean by that? Let me tell you a story that Dean Hollerith of our National Cathedral told.

He writes, "When I was a little boy growing up in suburban Alexandria, I only remember one widow who was around the same age as my mom. Her name was Bea, and she was a marvelous lady, despite all the tragedy she had known in her life. You see, her husband took his own life with a handgun, but only after he tried to take hers as well. She survived, but her face was badly disfigured. Every Sunday, just about, we drove Bea to church. The doctors told her she shouldn't drive, so she rode with us. However, Bea was not in any way some sort of helpless victim, she had suffered greatly in life, but she was proud and determined and deeply faithful. For years, she taught Sunday school and I loved her for her simple faith in God's goodness. And her love of

all of us who were fortunate enough to be her student. She was a special person to my family and to my church.

The church had cared for her during an unimaginably tragic time in her life and thereafter, she spent years teaching the faith to successive generations of young people. By her very presence and her personality, she was a witness to the power of God to heal, to the power of God's love to bring about a resurrected life. I loved her dearly. And if she taught me anything, it was that new life is always possible. There's nothing God cannot redeem. You see, Bea didn't hide the pain she had suffered or the losses that she had experienced. Not only were these realities visible in the scars on her face, but over time through the grace of God, she was able to incorporate these events into her life and transform them into a kind of fuel, that enabled her to be more empathetic, more loving, more understanding than almost anyone I've ever known. She knew a resurrected life. But it was a life that included all of her, her joys and her sorrows.

The paradox of resurrection is that Jesus's scarred body eventually comforted his disciples. His wounded hands and feet pulled them out of disbelief and into radical, life-altering faith. Jesus also calls us to be in the world, the real life here and now world of sickness and lousy days. The real world of strained relationships and misunderstandings and disappointments. The real world that is filled with both incredible beauty and joy and unspeakable sadness and tragedy.

That's why we are witnesses of "these things." Witnesses to God's great love shown in Jesus, witnesses to the power of resurrection, witnesses to God's love for all the earth. We are called to be in the world spreading the Good News of Resurrection through both our words and our actions. So, the question for all of us this morning is how do we do this and be witnesses to the world?

You see resurrection incorporates our wounds, our pains, our struggles, our imperfections, all that we are. Just as Jesus greeted his friends still bearing the holes in his hands and feet and the wound in his side so too it is okay for us to show our wounds, our vulnerability to connect with those around us. Sometimes it is through our own brokenness that Christ is seen by others in us. Resurrection in this life involves the reality of being wounded, coupled with the truth of new life. It is about the pain of being human and the love of God that can make us more than we are. It means bringing it all with us, our hurts and our hopefulness, and putting it to work in the world and bearing our scars without allowing them to define us.

So, you see to be a Christian witness is not simply to repeat what we have heard. It is to give our lives as evidence of the truth. Belief in the resurrected Lord can't be argued or explained to someone. Even Jesus didn't try that. He knew that the truth had to be seen, had to be touched, had to be experienced in the living.

Jesus explained the scriptures and taught his disciples in the flesh. We, on the other hand, may be the only gospel another person will read. And we do that by living what we say we believe. Consider the following poem by Brian Cavanaugh:

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Are read by more than a few.
But the one that is most read and commented on
Is the gospel according to you.

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the things that you do and the words that you say.
People read what you write, whether faithless or true.
Say, what is the gospel according to you?
Do others read His truth and His love in your life?
Or has yours been too full of malice and strife?
Does your life speak of evil, or does it ring true?
Say, what is the gospel according to you?

We are witnesses when we can invite someone to look into our lives and find Jesus there. We are witnesses when we allow ourselves to be touched by folks who are lost and afraid. We are witnesses when we live for mercy, do justice, forgive the unforgiveable and hold out hope for the hopeless. We are witnesses when we live in a way that defies any explanation other than the presence of the risen Christ within us. Look, touch, see, believe! It isn't a ghost. It's the living God. Resurrection is real. It's possible for all of us. Not only in the life to come, but in this life as well. He is risen. Amen.