

Got Fish?

April 18, 2021

Luke 24: 36b-48

*³⁶ Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you".
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 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 Messiah 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 witnesses of these things".*

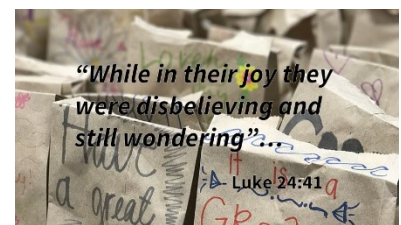


Last Sunday we reflected on how seeing and confirming the resurrection of Jesus actually had very little to do with *following* Jesus. In the same way, we came to

understand that seeing faith lived out does not lead to faith itself. When others see us living out our faith, it can draw them towards Jesus and towards belief in him. Witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ as we live out our daily lives will lead to questioning and curiosity about what makes us different. This means of planting seeds of faith in others is just the beginning of their journey of faith. As we begin to look at the disciples' interaction with the risen Christ, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Turn with me to Luke 24 as we begin to look at our passage for today. As Jesus appears to the disciples this time, he begins with the same words: *"Peace be with you"*. In our passage we read that the disciples were startled and terrified, thinking they were seeing a ghost. They are a bit like the disciples from last week's passage in John 20. They are not quite sure of what they are seeing. In verse 38 Jesus asks them, *"Why are your frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"* Jesus invites them to see his hands and feet. See, here is physical proof. *"See that it is I myself"*. Sensing that there is still some doubt, Jesus invites them to *"touch me and see"*. After all, ghosts do not have flesh and bones. He then goes on to actually show them his hands and his feet. See, here is real physical proof. And yet we read in verse 41,

"While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering". Imagine how Jesus might have felt. They can see and touch him. There is proof of who he is in the scars on his hands and feet. Even as they were filled with joy at the thought of the resurrection being true, even with Jesus standing before them, they were still disbelieving and wondering – could it be true?



At this point, one might expect Jesus to become frustrated with these disciples. How could they not believe? How could their hearts be so hard? Disbelief, doubt, wondering – these are the same things that Jesus faced when Thomas did not believe that the others had seen the risen Christ. Last week in our passage from John 20, Jesus met Thomas where he was at. He needed to physically see the scars. Jesus showed him the scars. Jesus meets these disciples where they are at as well. Still in their disbelief and wondering, Jesus goes practical. He asks, *"Do you have anything to eat?"* He shares a most basic practice with them. Jesus takes a piece of fish and eats it with the disciples. Jesus sat at the table and ate, practicing a symbolic gesture in that first-century Jewish culture. By sitting and eating with the disciples, Jesus practiced acceptance and welcome. He joined them in community.



During our Lenten study, we practiced five habits that helped others to see and experience the reign and rule of Christ being present in the world. The second habit was to eat with others. The challenge was to eat with three people, at least one from outside the church. About a dozen of us prepared and served a meal to those struggling with issues of poverty and homelessness on Saturday, March 6th. The meal served outside of First United Methodist Church begins at 11:00. We arrived and got everything set up. It was 10:45 so I decided to talk with a few people. Jeff was in the front of the line. Georgia was right there, next to the front of the line. I chatted briefly with my old friends from the HOPE Center. The third man in the line was someone I did not know.



For almost 15 minutes we stood and talked. Well, he did most of the talking. I was blessed to hear his story. Growing up in California he had run with a gang and spent several years behind bars. Returning to that world as a young adult, he continued to struggle with drugs and alcohol and returned to prison at least two more times. During his last stint in prison, he began to search for more and began to read a Bible and then started attending a worship service and Bible study. The more he read, the more his faith grew. He was released from prison and sought to be a better man. But because of his past and because of his on-and-off struggles with addiction, he would continue to have run-ins with the law and others in authority. He ended up leaving California and the world and life he had known for so long. He had been in Rapid City for almost a year when we met. During our time together, his language was rough and his pain from all that he had experienced was very evident. In and through all of that, he spoke openly of his faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Each day was and probably will always be a struggle for my new friend.

As 11:00 came, I thanked him for the conversation, prayed for the food, and we began to serve those gathered that day. The line was short, so we had food and time to take around to those still there, enjoying a good meal in the sunshine. I found my new friend again and offered him another sandwich and a bag of chips. He was grateful for the meal and the time we could share in community. Sitting together, sharing food, together we practiced acceptance and welcome. If I see him again at the HOPE Center or on the street, I will welcome him and check in to see how he is doing. I hope that we will one day again share the love of Jesus Christ with one another.



As Jesus shared a meal with the disciples, he continued to help the disciples to understand what had happened during his last days of ministry and physical life. Jesus was telling them his story once again. In verse 44, Jesus

reminds them that he had spoken these words before – *"while I was still with you"* - telling of all that must happen to fulfill what was written in the scriptures.

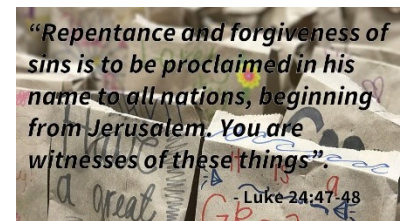
And then, around the table, Jesus *"opened their minds to understand the scriptures"*.

Jesus explained that the Messiah must suffer and rise again on the third day. He was also preparing them to continue on with the mission. In verses

47 and 48 Jesus defines the mission. Here he says,

"repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things".

You are witnesses of these things".



Just as my new friend opened my mind to an experience much different than my own on that Saturday at the end of March, Jesus offered new insight and understanding to the disciples. Knowing my new friend's story opened my mind to struggles I have not known or experienced. Hearing his story, I better understand and empathize with people and situations that are outside of my life experiences. I am a better person and Christian because of my time in fellowship and conversation with my new friend. This can be true for all of us. And there, on the street, I was able to reassure him of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus offers to all who believe in him. There I was able to share the love of Christ with and for my fellow disciples.



Around the table, or around a sack lunch on the street in Rapid City, we share in community. There, in community, we see one another as fellow children of God. There, in community, we become equals – sharing the same food and space. There, in community, we build bonds of friendship. And there, in community, we become more likely to be open to the other, to those who are different from us. When we stop and spend time in table fellowship and in conversation with another - whether on the street in Rapid City, whether around the table in the work room at the office, whether around the table in the school cafeteria, whether around the family table in your home – there, at the table, we become open and welcoming and accepting of one another.

Our Christian faith was birthed and nurtured around the table. Our faith continues to sustain and feed us all, regardless of our background, regardless of our baggage, regardless of who or what we once were. Around the table we find space to include others and we are given the opportunity to show others their worth and value. Through radical hospitality and inclusion, may we each invite our friends, our neighbors, and even our enemies to join us at the table and in true fellowship, witnessing powerfully to the love of Christ, transforming hearts and lives as we seek to build the kingdom of God here in this time and place. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you consider those 'new friends' that you have met, how have they helped you to grow in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. When you think about those you might be called to share food and/or fellowship with, who comes to mind? Pray for an opportunity!
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 24: 49-53. How do these verses wrap up Jesus' time on earth? How do they empower the disciples then and now to share the good news of Jesus Christ?