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Luke 24:36b-48

PROOF OF LIFE

Our family dog is dying. She was diagnosed with terminal cancer a week ago. The first sign that something was wrong was a change in her appetite. Sometimes she would eat, but other times she would just sniff her food and walk away. Then she got really sick and didn't show any interest in food whatsoever. But since the cancer was diagnosed, she has rallied a bit and her appetite has improved. And it has given us such joy to see her interested in food and eating it with relish. We know she doesn't have long to live, but her eating is symbolic of her continued connection with the world of the living. To eat is to be engaged with the most basic aspect of living—the nourishment of the body. To not eat is to sever that connection with life.

Think about what typically takes place after a funeral or memorial service. After the funeral ends, the congregation heads down to the Fellowship Room for a reception where we gather around tables filled with platters of little triangle shaped sandwiches, and fruit, and cookies, and we eat. Or the family members, after leaving the graveside service, gather together at a nearby restaurant and they eat. Or neighbors and friends swing by the family's home and drop off lasagnas and casseroles and cakes. At the very occasion when we are forced to face the reality of death and grieve a death, we, the living, participate in the most life-affirming activity possible: we eat.

The risen Jesus offers evidence that he is alive, truly alive, by eating. It is Easter evening and the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples--and they are at first terrified. Jesus is supposed to be dead! So naturally, they think what they are seeing is a ghost. But Jesus proves to them he is no ghost. First he invites them to touch him and to feel that he is flesh and bones.

He is solid like any living human being. And then Jesus asks the disciples for something to eat. And they give him some fish and he eats it in front of them. Ghosts don't eat. Only the living, only those with bodies to nourish, need to eat.

It was important to Jesus that his disciples understood that he was really and truly alive. Ghosts belong to the realm of the dead. But in the Resurrection, the God of life had fully and completely triumphed over death. Jesus wanted his friends to understand that in gazing upon him, they were witnesses to God's victory over death. So Jesus offered them proof that he was alive—by eating.

But what about us these two weeks since Easter? What proof can we offer that we are fully alive? Certainly we have been eating and drinking these past two weeks. But there is more to life than just eating and drinking and walking about doing our daily activities. Jesus himself declared that fact when earlier in the Gospel of Luke he said, "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing." Jesus came to offer us life, abundant life. He rose from the grave to offer us new life, a resurrected life. So the question we might ask ourselves in this season of Eastertide is: "Could anyone looking at our lives see any proof of life—of the Resurrected life?"

Are you alive or are you just going through the motions of living each day?

Can the Resurrected life be found in you or are you preoccupied with the never-ending race to get more, be more, have more?

Are you alive or are you carrying around anger and resentment in your heart?

Are you alive or do you still feel as though you are unworthy of love or acceptance?

Are you alive or are you stuck in old habits, old attitudes, old ways of behaving that have not been very life-giving but you cling to them out of familiarity?

Are you alive or do you hang on to what you have for fear of having less?

Are you alive or does fear keep you from doing something new?

Are you alive or are you weighed down and guilt-ridden by your past?

Are you alive or have you accepted that there is nothing more you can expect from this one wild and precious life you have been given than passing a few decades acquiring and consuming and accommodating yourself to boredom?

Are we alive to the good news that God loves us, forgives us, calls us and empowers us to offer our precious lives and our resources to join in the work of God's kingdom?

What proof of life could any one witness in your life or in mine?

Jesus lived and Jesus died and Jesus rose so that you and I might have life--not partial life or moderate life, but *abundant* life. We have mistakenly thought that abundant life can be found in the abundance of material goods, in big houses, in lucrative careers, in nice clothes, in fancy electronic gadgets, in exotic vacations. But as we in our culture have pursued these things, we have become more and more ghost-like. We've become apparitions who *resemble* living beings but who are really in the clutches of death. The Resurrection is God's effort to make us fully alive, to conquer those things that bring death to us, and to set us free to really live.

Jesus gives us two clues in this Easter evening story about what can help us become truly alive. He instructs his disciples that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations." Proof that we are genuinely alive is found when we repent and when we accept the forgiveness of sins.

Consider for a minute what it has meant to you to be forgiven for something. Forgiveness sets a person free from the burden of their wrongdoing. Jesus taught that God forgives us and through forgiving us, offers us a fresh chance at life. If we cannot accept God's forgiveness, we will be held back in the tomb of our guilt and shame and disgrace. But if we

accept God's mercy, we are able to move forward into the new life God desires for us. Seeking and accepting forgiveness are evidence of the Resurrected life.

And so too is repentance. Repentance is proof of life—of the Resurrected life. In the Bible, repentance means turning in a new direction, specifically in the direction of God. Imagine our lives as if we are walking along a path—a path of our own making. On this path, when people hurt us we get mad and seek revenge, lash out, engage in violence, say hurtful things. On this path, we strive to acquire all the money and possessions we can for ourselves and for our sense of security. On this path that we are walking along, we become suspicious of people not like us and reject them from our communities, or enslave them, or exploit them, or ignore them. On this path we are too preoccupied with ourselves to help others or share our resources. On this path we do what we want and what we feel like doing, we engage in excessive habits that harm ourselves and all creation. We walk along this path without realizing it is leading us to our deaths.

But Jesus comes along and calls us to turn around and walk a different path in a different direction. Jesus calls us to walk the path toward God. And *that* is what repentance is about. It is about turning our lives around and walking the path toward God, because the path toward God leads to abundant life. If we resist repentance, if we refuse to repent of certain attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles, if we are unwilling to consider that we are walking on a misguided path, unwilling to consider the error of our ways, we are holding on to the ways of death, to the tomb, and resisting the new life God makes possible.

The thing about walking the path toward God is that we do not always walk it perfectly. Despite our intentions, we often get sidetracked. So, repentance becomes a necessary part of our daily lives. Maybe it is helpful to think about repentance as our *orientation*. We will not walk

the path toward God perfectly, but as followers of Jesus we strive in our lives to *orient* ourselves toward the way of Jesus Christ. We gather with others who also share a commitment to orienting their lives toward the way of Jesus Christ--a community that proclaims the love and mercy and justice of God. And when we fail, when we step off the path, we have a community that can help us turn once again toward the path that leads to genuine life.

And in that constant effort to orient ourselves toward the way of Jesus Christ, we offer evidence that we are truly and abundantly alive. In the face of all the deathly forces in this world--of wars and racism and loneliness and selfishness and suffering--the people of this world desperately need to see proof of life. How about we show them?