

Third Sunday of Easter B | April 14, 2024 | Luke 24:36b-48 |

Have you ever found something that was lost and of great value to you? Perhaps a grandmother's wedding ring, or a watch from your father? Have you ever lost something like that for a l-o-n-g time? Then, when it was found, with joy and disbelief you said, "I can't believe it! I can't believe it! I found it!" OR Have you been present with someone on the golf course and they hit a hole-in-one; or watched a homerun in baseball; or a long pass that was caught at the end of a football game; or watched on tv a last second three point shot in a basketball game? Or an overtime goal game in an NHL game? You might have said, "I can't believe my eyes!" yet you were delighted. With each of these, there is reason to be joyful – an item is found, or a play is made in sports; you could not believe it...not quite.

It seems to have been similar with the disciples. They were probably discussing the events told to them by the women who were at the empty tomb on Easter morning and the message the angels had told the women. They certainly were discussing the events described to them by the two disciples who ran back from Emmaus. These two ran back because they wanted to tell others about how a stranger who walked with them on the road, he turned out to be Jesus when they broke bread with him...and then he vanished. Now as they are discussing those events of the day, and "poof!" Jesus is there. Usually we think, "poof" and someone is gone. But today, it's "poof" and Jesus is there. Jesus says, "Peace to you!" [v.36] The disciples are startled and frightened thinking they are seeing a ghost. In response, Jesus says, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" [v.38] It seems as if he says, "Get a

grip. Get hold of yourself.” But he adds something very different, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” So, it is as if Jesus says, “Rather than get hold of yourself, better yet, get hold of me; get a grip on me!”

Then, in their joy they are still disbelieving and marveling. [v.41] That is, they are joyful, but can't believe it – it's too good to be true. Like, “Jesus is alive...but he died” – it's too good to be true. “Jesus is standing before us, but he was laid in a grave” – it's too good to be true. “Jesus let us touch his hands and feet...but they should be stiff and cold and in a tomb.” It all seems too good to be true. So, now what?

Now, Jesus asks, “Have you anything here to eat?” [v.41] That's like, “What's for supper?” In reply to the question, “Have you anything here to eat?” Jesus is given broiled fish. The fish is eaten by Jesus. This IS a body and not a ghost, not a disembodied spirit.

You may have seen cartoons or even action movies made with computer generated ghosts. In these, if someone reaches to grab what is portrayed as a ghost, their hand passes through. It's often a comedic moment for there is no real body there. In these cartoons or movies, if a ghost eats or drinks something the food or liquid falls to the ground. Again a comedic moment. In the Gospel story, the disciples think Jesus is a ghost or spirit and may expect to grab “nothing” when he says, “Touch me.” When they give him the broiled fish, they might expect what he puts in his mouth to fall to the ground through his body. But this is no ghost, no spirit. It's the risen Jesus with a resurrected body!

We might have titled this sermon, “Eating with ghosts... or not.” If Jesus were only a spirit, this text would be a comedic scene with the disciples’ hands passing through Jesus’ body and the fish he swallowed landing on the floor. But instead, he eats and the disciples are moved to understand that Jesus has a resurrected **body**. In addition, their minds are opened to the scriptures. We hear this story, we belong to those who hear Jesus say, “Peace to you.” We hear this story; we are among those who are invited to move from our own fears to joy and disbelieving to having our minds opened to the scriptures. We hear this story; we may become witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection and life.

There is an important “bridge” in today’s story of Jesus. I just hinted at it. Initially the disciples hear and see Jesus. Initially they might touch his hands and feet. Initially they watch him eat broiled fish. These things move them from “It’s a ghost” to seeing that this Jesus is alive and has a resurrected body. Then, at the end Jesus says, “You are witnesses.” The bridge? It is this, “Jesus opened their minds to the scriptures.” We will come back to that in a bit.

“You will be my witnesses,” says Jesus [v. 48] There are a couple kinds of witnesses. There are eye witnesses – “I saw these things happen.” There are also character witnesses – “This is how I know the person. This is how this person has affected my life.” I think Jesus wanted his disciples to be both kinds of witnesses. Many of them were eye witnesses to the events of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. All of them were character witnesses who could share how Jesus had affected or made for a change in their lives.

Guess what? Jesus says to us, “You are witnesses.” We can describe the events of Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection as we have seen them in the scriptures. We have not seen the events with our eyes, but we have seen them in the scriptures. In addition, we can be character witnesses. We can witness to how Jesus has affected our lives.

The bridge in the text for the disciples is this: “Jesus opened their minds to the scriptures.” The bridge for us is the same, Jesus opens our minds to the scriptures. The bridge connects the events we see in the bible to our witness, as we speak about the way Jesus has affected us. So each of us is a character witness.

For us, Jesus opens our minds to the scriptures in congregational life so that we may share a witness to the events in the story of Jesus and also become character witnesses – we may bear witness to the way Jesus affects us. Just before speaking of being witnesses, Jesus had said, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations...” [vv.46, 47] For us to become witnesses, we need to hear again and again the stories of Jesus so that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” is heard by each one of us! When Jesus says among us “Peace to you!” he addresses us as whole persons. The peace Jesus brings includes forgiveness for you and for me, even if it is not limited to that.

Filled with the life of the Risen Jesus, we not only are affected by Jesus, but become the body of Jesus in this time and place.

You are a witness to the events in the story of Jesus, and at the same time a witness to the way Jesus has affected you. As a witness you and I become means of God's grace and vehicles of God's eternal love! Can you believe it? Amen.