**April 15, 2018**

**Luke 24:36-48; 1 John 3:1-7**

The story in Luke comes after Christ’s resurrection, and immediately on the heels of an earlier encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. These stories are each headline news stories for Easter: “CHRIST IS RISEN!” “WOMEN SEE JESUS IN THE GARDEN!” “DISCIPLES DON’T RECOGNIZE JESUS ON THE ROAD! … though their hearts were burning within them…” “DISCIPLES RECOGNIZE JESUS AS THEY EAT TOGETHER!” Then today’s story: JESUS APPEARS AGAIN TO THE DISCIPLES! … another meal with the risen Christ.”

It may seem like we are reading the same story over and over again, but each of these was a separate encounter. The gospel writers were building the case for future readers to know that *these* things are real: (1) **Jesus** is risen. People saw him. People recognized him. It wasn’t some stranger dressed in disguise. It was **Jesus**. (2) Jesus was **alive**. Jesus was walking and eating and drinking -- doing things that living, breathing humans do. And each time he showed his wounds to the disciples, he proved both that it was him and that those wounds were not the end of him. (3) Jesus returned with **peace**. He did not storm in anger or lament their failings. He didn’t even complain about his own suffering or pain. Instead, he brought peace and hope to his dear friends. *And* (4) Jesus returned to spur them on to **action**. His death was not the end of their commitment. They had work to do – share the peace and spread the good news: repentance and forgiveness pave “the way of the Lord.”

These stories tell us a lot about God. There is such grace and love tucked around these encounters. Patiently, tenderly, repeatedly, Jesus visited the disciples to tell them what they should already have known. He invited them to touch and see and ask questions. He moved them beyond their shame and grief and fear to a renewed faith and commitment to mission. He pulled them back into the family, giving them both a reason and place to belong. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.”

These stories also tell us a lot about the disciples and ourselves. Despite everything that had happened, and despite the encounters with Jesus after his resurrection, the disciples continued to be huddled together, fearful, and away from the people and the work that had filled their days. And despite the fact that they *hadn’t* shown themselves to be dedicated or worthy followers of God, Jesus immediately went back to them with another invitation to love and serve. And they said, “yes.” They ran with the news. They opened their hands and hearts. Earlier failures didn’t derail them. The possibility of future failure didn’t curtail them. They brushed off the dirt and fear, rejoicing in this wondrous Savior. One more chance. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.”

In these post-resurrection encounters, the camaraderie between Jesus and the disciples is clear. Like someone approaching a wounded animal, Jesus came to them slowly, with his hands out, calling, hoping, willing them to trust in him. He repeatedly showed them not just that he was with them in their journey, but that their experience was *like* his. Their fleshy bodies and questioning minds were how they understood who one another were, and what each other could do. Their bodies gave them identity – within themselves and for one another. Jesus’ own body was how they knew him. It was what they had seen and touched and walked beside and worked beside for all those many months. He ate with them, satisfying the physical needs of his body. He suffered for them, testing the physical and emotional limits of his body. Jesus’ body was an essential part of his time on earth; it made him human, and made him like them. So because he was fully human (while also being fully God), he understood why they responded to the resurrection by running away. He knew that their primal instinct was to avoid more fear and suffering. And he knew that they were desperate for reassurance. He knew that they were really just desperate.

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, said, “The really hungry can smell fresh bread a mile away. For those who know their need, God is immediate – not an idea, not a theory, but life, food, air for the stifled spirit and the beaten, despised, exploited body.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The smell of fresh bread makes you hungry because you’ve tasted it and know how wonderfully satisfying those bites can be. The smell makes you hungry because you know what you’re missing in that moment.

The disciples knew what they were missing in these moments after Easter. They were really hungry for Christ’s comforting presence. Despite several of them having already seen and talked with Jesus, they were desperate for more signs of hope. More opportunities to ask. More time to wonder. More moments to touch and believe. So while my less than gracious self might read these stories and exclaim with frustration, “haven’t they had enough? When will they just trust and believe? What is it going to take?” The more generous side of myself realizes that they never fully abandoned Jesus. They continued to come together, asking and wondering. They continued to seek and tell because they were hungry. Jesus was life and food and air for their broken bodies. Jesus was hope for their broken spirits. They smelled the fragrance of Christ as soon as he burst his tomb and started hunting for its source.

My mother went away for a summer of post-graduate work when I was a little girl. My dad made do as best he could with my little brother and me. We ate a lot of spaghetti and hotdogs. And my hair which had never been cut (and was quite long; I used to pretend to be Crystal Gayle and sing and dance while moving my hair all around), Dad decided that it was too difficult to take care of, so he cut it all off into a pixie cut. I’ve never forgiven him. At any rate, it was a summer of big changes that necessitated some growing up on everyone’s part. There was no FaceTime or Skype or cell phone or email, or any way to keep in touch on a daily or hourly basis. She was essentially *gone* for several months. We grieved her absence and looked forward to one planned visit in the middle of her semester. My dad managed to pack our suitcases and get us in the car. And, long before the internet or Google or technological navigation aids, as we drove away from home into the great wide world, it suddenly occurred to me that we were without our usual navigator. My mother always had the directions. She was always the one who took care of all the details – the picnic lunches at rest stops, the extra clothes for unexpected messes, a car game at just the right time – so without her being there to keep us in line and on track, how would we ever get where we were going? How could we possibly find my mother in a strange place? I clearly remember my dad responding that he could smell his way to her. Of course, I imagined cartoon images of fresh baked pies resting on windowsills with their smell wafting down the breeze to a nearby hungry neighbor. I really thought that my dad could smell my mother hours away; every once in a while I would sniff the air to see if *I* could smell her, too. I was hungry to see her, and willing to do anything that might help find her.

Perhaps the disciples knew this mixture of grief and hope. Perhaps they, too, were sniffing around for hints of Jesus. They were really hungry for hope. But after the traumatic events of Holy Week, they weren’t exactly sure what had happened.

Sara Miles wrote that “conversion is a process. It keeps happening, with cycles of acceptance and resistance, epiphany and doubt.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The disciples’ tenuous faith in Jesus led to times of clear, committed faith, and other moments of questions and resistance. Even here, Luke wrote that “in their joy, they were disbelieving and still wondering…”

We, too, find ourselves in cycles of doubt and avoidance and hope and trust. Even if we come to church. Even if we say our prayers. Even if we have lived through decades of Easters. And when we are afraid, when we have suffered, when Jesus reaches out to us, we, too, ask, “is it you, Jesus?” Have you returned for me? Can I try again?

Allow yourself to be hungry for God. Give yourself permission to sniff around for Jesus in your life. Even if you are hiding away from the world, even if you are broken by life. Don’t be ashamed of your moments of doubt and fear. Don’t be ashamed of not recognizing God or not doing as Christ taught. Trust that Jesus returned to feed the hungry, forgive the wayward, and bind up the broken, just as he had been. For God loves us enough to give us one more chance. “See what love that God has given us, that we should be called children of God.” Amen.

1. Miles, Sara. Take This Bread. page 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, page 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)