

The Third Sunday of Easter – Luke 24:36b-48  
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Sedona Arizona

*Wonder, Welcome & Witness*

Today's Gospel reading from Luke sounds very similar to the one we heard last week from John. The risen Jesus appears before the disciples and offers the greeting, "Peace be with you." He shows them his wounded body and invites them to touch him. The disciples are startled and terrified, but there are no locked doors. And if you were to read this narrative from a Bible rather than the Gospel lectionary, you might notice that the first part of the first sentence has been deleted, and the people gathered there aren't identified generically as the disciples. In fact, not one person is named in today's reading, except Jesus. This is basically how the paragraph begins in the Bibles that I researched: "While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them . . ." Astute listeners may wonder, who "they" are, and what have they been talking about.

If we go back one paragraph, we learn that some of the people gathered are "the eleven and their companions." But this group of people are not just talking among themselves. They are sharing exciting news with other unnamed people who had just returned to Jerusalem.

If we want to know who those people are, we need to go back one more paragraph. It is there that Luke shares his version of Jesus' first resurrection appearance to Cleopas and his companion, as they walk home to the village of Emmaus. Cleopas and his unnamed companion, possibly his wife, had been in Jerusalem during the Passover festival. Events took a turn for the worse when the prophet Jesus of Nazareth had unexpectedly been arrested, tortured, and crucified. And just that morning, they learned from other companions that Jesus' body was no longer in the

tomb where it had been laid to rest. All of them were surprised and distraught because they had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel. While the two were discussing these events, a stranger appeared and asked them what they were talking about. Not yet knowing that the stranger was Jesus, they tell him of their bewildering and heartbreaking experiences. They bear witness to what we now call the Passion of Jesus Christ, yet these two companions did not yet understand the meaning of the empty tomb. They had not yet considered the Resurrection. Jesus admonished them for not connecting what they had learned from the Hebrew scriptures, with what they had experienced during his ministry, and with what they had witnessed during the last week of his life.

They had forgotten what Jesus had told them about being raised on the third day, and weren't even considering what it meant for their future relationship with Jesus.

Apparently, the two were not taken aback by Jesus' scolding and impromptu lecture. Rather they listened intently to what most of us would gladly welcome: a clear, concise, and credible interpretation of all the scriptures. But that was not all that Jesus revealed to the two. As they came near the village, evening was approaching, so the two urged their new acquaintance to stay with them. Inviting a stranger into one's home was common practice for that culture and time. But what happened when they gathered for a meal was uncommon. When they were at the table, their guest took on the role of host. Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them, just as he had done on many other occasions, including during his ministry at the feeding of the 5,000, and during their last supper together. Not only did the two suddenly realize with whom they were learning about scripture and breaking bread, their hearts were burning with recognition that the resurrected Jesus had been bodily present with them this whole time, and they even didn't

know it -- until now. Jesus was present amidst all their wondering, and welcoming, and witnessing. Jesus was alive in new and unexpected ways!

This stunning realization had to be shared with the others right away, so the two companions headed back to Jerusalem to tell the eleven and their companions. The two went back to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection and to the resurrection realities<sup>1</sup> of his presence in companionship, conversation, and scriptural interpretation; in hospitality, table fellowship, and evangelism. When the two arrived to share the good news with the others, the eleven and their companions had good news to share as well: "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon." Although we do not hear details of Jesus' post resurrection appearance to Simon Peter, we learn how these companions have come back together to share in their wonderment about Jesus' resurrection, and their new understandings about the realities of resurrection in their own lives. This is where the story begins in the Gospel narrative for today.

In Luke's account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, listeners are easily drawn into the narrative because the author does not identify by name who "they" were.

By not naming any of Jesus' companions from this point to the end of the Gospel, Luke invites us into the wonder and mystery of Jesus' resurrection, and to imagine how we may embody resurrection realities in our own lives by responding to Jesus' call to participate in his ministry: to offer hospitality to the poor and the hungry; to accompany the sick and the imprisoned; to serve as allies with the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-easter-2/commentary-on-luke-2436b-48>

disenfranchised and the oppressed. And to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins. Repentance for creating and maintaining systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice; repentance of greed, selfishness, and exploitation; repentance of inhumane acts that we inflict upon one another. The overall concept of repentance and forgiveness can be as elusive as the concept of resurrection unless we bear witness to what they mean for relationships that have been shaped by past actions, influence present circumstances, and inspire future hopes for reconciliation and new life.

Here in Arizona, we live among indigenous peoples whose land was stolen from them by our nation's founders. Native peoples who survived violence and disease were made to relocate their communities to unfamiliar places where resources for shelter, food, and water were unknown.

Those who survived by learning to make a new life for themselves were later identified as being a "problem" for settlers during westward expansion. Although nation-to-nation treaties were created between Native peoples and colonizers, many of those binding agreements are still not honored today.

In her novel, *The Night Watchman*, Louise Erdrich shares how one of her Chippewa relatives repeatedly resisted the U.S. government's attempts in the 1950s to terminate tribes by dismantling Indian reservations through relocation, re-education, and assimilation. Erdrich's grandfather witnessed before Congress about the detrimental effects of tribal termination on the Chippewa way of life: the attempted erasure of indigenous culture, their language, and their sacred traditions. His witnessing inspired other Native tribes to resist attempts of cultural genocide, which in turn has inspired many of us to be allies who stand in solidarity with our Native neighbors to uphold their sovereign rights, honor their cultural

practices, and respect their spiritual ways of life that are connected with all of creation.

Throughout Erdrich's story, I heard many instances of resurrection realities that inspired hope for repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Hope in wondering why injustice and inequality are still allowed to thrive. Hope in truth-telling and deep listening. Hope in sharing common values of mutual respect.

Hope in sharing land, food, water, and other resources. And hope in our collaborative efforts to create unity and peace among the many indigenous and settler nations who call this continent home.

All of us can experience and embody resurrection realities that heal broken relationships and offer hope for new life when we wonder, welcome, and witness with one another. Together we are witnesses of these things. We are witnesses.

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