

“We’ve A Story to Tell”

Acts 3:12-19; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

April 15, 2018 -- 3rd of Easter

Acts 3:12-19

{12} When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? {13} The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. {14} But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, {15} and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. {16} And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. {17} "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. {18} In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. {19} Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

Luke 24:36b-48

... 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.

A microphone is thrust in the face of a person who has just witnessed, who has just accomplished, who has just encountered something or someone or some significant event. Most of the time, in the moments that follow such an occasion the interviewer is met with a glazed look in the eye and some muttered response related to, "it just hasn't sunk in yet." Which basically, of course, means that the person hasn't had a chance to process what they saw, did or experienced. Even later, after having seen something, or heard something we, upon time for reflection may not be able to relate perfectly what we experienced. And there's the phenomena of two people being asked about the same thing and giving two different descriptions.

Certainly this is the case concerning the most important story of all time -- the resurrection -- there are some discrepancies due to nothing more than perspective. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are all witnesses in their own way, and are also reporting events as described to them by witnesses like disciples, but, again, perspectives change and not all witnesses see things the same way. That doesn't mean that the powerful truth of resurrection does not come through, it does mean that there are different versions. And for John and Luke, especially, there is a definite period of instruction and the sharpening of the story before Jesus physically departs from his followers. It is a time when we work through out joyful disbelief...to faith.

We are in that period of the church year when we practice that perfection of our knowledge of the story. We know this time as the great fifty days. The great fifty days is the number of days between the great Easter celebration and the day on which we celebrate Pentecost. At the 40 day mark of this stretch of days is the day of the ascension, when Jesus, as the Apostles' creed says, ascended to heaven. For those actual witnesses of the Easter story, this is a period in which the disciples and others get used to the idea of Jesus being resurrected, of his being once again physically alive among them, and of their call to be witnesses.

This is what this period Jesus spends on earth before the ascension and before the outpouring of the spirit on Pentecost is all about. It is about helping that which is so very hard to believe, that life can follow death, become reality. Jesus is seeking to use the truth of his resurrection as a mind expanding experience that will equip those who will be the church to be 'witnesses' to the truth and the good news of the resurrection.

Today we have another story, this time from Luke, that follows the same pattern as those from John. He comes he says, 'Peace be with you. . .', but even though the disciples have seen and heard about his resurrection many times by now they are still 'startled and terrified'.

Jesus says, 'why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?' And again he shows his hands and feet and even on this occasion he asks for something to eat, not because he's hungry, but to further illustrate that

he is Jesus, in the flesh-- alive. And he speaks to them as a gathered assembly and 'opens their minds' -- expands their minds -- to understand the scriptures and the truth of the resurrection.

He then tells them, again, that they are to be the ones who are to be witness to his death and resurrection. They are to be the ones to go out and tell the world about him -- to be his witnesses in the world.

There was a local church pastor who was working with her confirmation class on the duties of the Christian. When asked about why they came to church. They talked about coming to church to learn about God and to participate in worship. But then she asked the class why else they came to church -- what else it was that Christians were supposed to do. And for a few moments the class was silent. Finally one of the young people in the class said, 'I guess we're supposed to tell other people about what we experience here.'

In the great fifty days, the message of Jesus is the same those learning about the faith as it was for his first followers as it is for us. As Christ's people we are called to worship and praise God's name, but we are also called to be witnesses to the truth of the resurrection in the world, to go from these walls to tell all of God's people 'about what we experience here.' We are supposed to be witnesses of what has happened to the church and to us since the resurrection.

For most of us Presbyterians this is about like saying, 'you need to show people you know and don't know your tax returns.' No, thanks! We just aren't too

sure, not about what we believe or what we know in our hearts, but in our ability to do the sharing part. Isn't it interesting that even in an age of almost anonymous communication – we still hesitate to tell good faith news. Anything else? No problem. We can have a grandchild, find a new burger joint, or discover a new spot to watch the sunset and it'll be out on social media before the first diaper is changed, before the last bite is consumed, or before the sky darkens. But, do we, if it's not our occupation, post our experience of a great worship service, or the angelic voices of a childrens' choir, or pride in a church's mission, or when your preacher manages a half way decent sermon?

When I was in high school we were doing a Christmas play that featured one hidden student, playing the role of God, engaged in dialogue with various other students, playing various roles. In the midst of a long discussion about where to place our limited number of microphones, somebody asked, "What about God? Does he need amplification?"

The truth is, God needs amplification. God needs to be heard and it is, guess who, the task of the church to 'amplify' God. To make God hearable and understandable and accessible to those in the world who need to hear and understand. As the church we have the story to tell. We are the ones who have a witness to give, and whether or not we choose to do this task will determine if those to whom we minister will get the message.

We are called to witnesses to the resurrection today. To tell that story of

what we know about Christ and what Christ has done for us in the way we live our lives, in the way we serve others and tell others the good news. It isn't our job to save people, it's our job to share with people the amazing news of the saving grace of Jesus Christ who has defeated death, our death, for us.

When Jesus charged us to be witnesses, he was charging us with more than telling a story, a story that is too good to be true. He was charging us with embracing the truth of what happened and applying it to a world of need.

In our living, in our lives, yours and mine, we constantly hear Jesus appear to us and say, 'peace be with you' and we try to live that way. We then have the opportunity, the calling, the responsibility to put our faith into action right here as we witness to the resurrection by being faithful, loving, caring people. We, people who believe in Christ, should act like Christ, loving and caring for all, who should serve Christ in worship and in the world -- people who should love as Christ loved and teach what Christ taught -- to love one another.

Jesus appears to us, offers us peace, and what he wants us to know is that he is alive -- and because he is alive -- we, too, can be alive in him. Alive to witness for him by telling others what we know and inviting them to be a part of the church that serves Christ -- by going ourselves right here and right now to see and respond to need in the mission of the church. And in faith, to send others into all the world to tell the good news with words and ministry and mission -- and together, as the church, to give witness to the resurrection.

In the unlikely scenario that you walk out of these doors this morning and someone puts a microphone in your face and asks rapid fire questions, “What did you see in there? What did you hear? Why are you here? Why is this important to you?” -- What would you say? Think about it. Think about what your answer would be. What do we see, and hear, why do we come, and why IS this important to us? We’re going to have different perspectives, different descriptions. But what’s yours? When you have an answer, that’s probably what you might want to post somewhere, or share with your neighbor, or tell your kids, or use to motivate your actions toward the good.

“Peace be with you.” Jesus says to us. In the peace of Christ, try to answer the questions. And God bless us as we do.