

King of Glory Lutheran Church
April 15, 2018
Third Sunday of Easter: Luke 24:36b-48
Time to Witness; People Need More
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

Grace and peace and power to you from the Risen Christ, Jesus!

There he was again. Jesus. In the room. Saying, “Peace be with you.” Chewing on fish. He was real! It was Him! The Lord knew that a one-time appearance wasn’t going to be enough to carry these faithful disciples onward after his death. They needed more. More speaking, more touching their hearts, more of Him.

Isn’t it curious that the text says, “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering?” Those are powerful verbs!

We can identify with those emotions. He gets down on one knee and holds out a ring box. “Oh my josh! Really! Right now! I mean we’ve talked about it, but now – are you doing what I think you’re doing?” Joy. Disbelief. Wonder.

Joy! The disciples are filled with joy that once again, they are truly seeing the risen Christ, once dead but now standing right in front of them. Hard to believe but it seems true. Maybe. “Is this really Jesus? Am I really seeing him in person?” Doubts.

Wondering. Wonder that it could be true. Wonder that I, a disciple am standing here experiencing this strange reality. Wondering, questioning, because what’s happening goes against all that I know and all I’ve been taught. Dead men don’t come back to life. Dead men stay dead.

I’m so thankful the text notes those three emotions, because for so many of us, those three words fit.

Joy – we walk into church feeling joy that we’re back again amongst friends and eager to meet new ones. The truth of Easter still clinging to our being like the sweetest perfume or cologne creates joy in our souls.

Disbelieving – we walk into church feeling disbelief that God has anything to say to me today. Disbelief that faith makes any sort of difference in today’s world. Disbelief because what I hear makes me ask more questions rather than feel more secure in my relationship with God.

Wonder - We walk into church wondering what we’ll hear and experience. We wonder if we fit in. We wonder if God accepts us. We wonder if there just might be a word of hope for me today. Or we’re in complete wonder and awe that God is here right in our midst, ready to receive and respond to our worship and praise.

And how often do we come experiencing more than one feeling? It's all part and parcel of the human experience, isn't it? Often feeling more than one emotion, we cannot separate them out as we come before the Lord.

Jesus proves to them that He is truly alive by eating a piece of fish. And then after opening their minds to understand the scriptures, he says, 'And you are witnesses of all these things.'

The implication is that "now you've seen me, go and tell about me."

Witnesses. They were the first ones! And without the written witness of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we wouldn't know the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Now a witness is someone who simply shares what they have experienced and observed. We do it all the time you know. "I just saw Fred and do you know what happened?...Well, he was standing on his front lawn and I was standing on mine...." We all tell stories. We are witness to the experiences of our own lives and others.

Of course being a witness carries responsibility. We tell the truth. We don't distort or gossip. I'm not talking about what fishermen do. The longer the story, the shorter the fish. Right?

But for our everyday experiences, can you agree that we are all witnesses?

Yes, you know where I'm about to go, don't you? So why is it so difficult for us to share our experiences and observations about our life with Jesus? Our life with God?

We often say that people will know us by our actions – our kindness and compassion. They will see Christ in who we are and what we do. Absolutely, people will notice that when others are angry, we are kind. They might notice that our words and our actions are consistent and coherent. That's great!

And Jesus said, "Go and tell." He didn't say, "Go and yell." Just be a witness.

I eat so often at a particular restaurant, that several of the employees know me by name. As we making conversation at the cash register, we often chat. So on Maundy Thursday, I stopped in to grab my lunch. The young woman asked, "How is your day going?"

I shared that we'd just had one worship service and were going to have another one that evening. Her face told me she didn't understand. I said, 'it's a pre-Easter thing.' Then holding my breath, I said, "Do you have a church you like to worship at on Easter Sunday?"

She said she did not, so I invited her here.

This last week, I stopped in again and the same young woman waited on me. She was pleasant and chatty. And as I got in my car, I thought, "Whew, she's still talking to me!"

Why is it that we're hesitant to be a witness? Oh, there are many reasons: faith is personal, we don't want to be rude, we fear rejection, we don't know what to say.

I'm at the point now, that actions are helpful; even Godly, but not enough. People, like those first disciples, need more.

With all of the words, media, narratives, sound bomb basting our heads, ears, and minds all the time, people need more. They need to know more of us who love God. They need to hear more of our stories. They need to be touched by our compassion and our words.

Now is the time! The disciples were locked in a room full of doubts, questions, wondering and fear. Nothing but Jesus with skin on would suffice.

Don't know if you've noticed, but people right now, today, are full of doubts, disbelief, questions, and fear. "What will tomorrow bring? Does my life make any difference at all? Is there anything after this?"

Now is the time. People need more. Our Christian experience, our Lutheran Christian experience has to get out in the popular narrative. There is a Christian narrative, but it too, unfortunately is often filled with boundaries and labels. As Pastor Chilson says, "To be witnesses to the risen Christ here and now, in this world, in this place is to get involved in life and death at its most confusing and conflictual. To be witnesses is to step out into a world at odds with itself, where people yell and scream across great divides of race, gender, economic interests, belief systems and national borders. To be witnesses is to step out into that world with words and actions of love and suffering, repentance and forgiveness, hope and joy."

This week in Living Lutheran (livinglutheran.org) we find the story of Olivia Konrardy-Buchal

First Lutheran Church, Onalaska, Wis.

Fifth-grader at Eagle Bluff Elementary School, Onalaska, Wis.

I believe that everyone should be treated equally and have a second chance. She **asked people to give money to the La Crosse Collaborative to End Homelessness for my birthday instead of gifts because** every year for the past three years I've donated money to somewhere instead of birthday presents. I figured other people need presents/money more than I do.

I pray for a safe and healthy day and night, and I pray that my friends and family are also safe. I also say thanks for the wonderful day I had. I normally pray in bed, but sometimes I pray during the day—and I, of course, pray at church.

My favorite Bible story is Ruth 1:16-17 because I read it at my parents' wedding. **When I talk to people about my church, I tell them** everyone's really nice and I have a lot of friends there. My pastors are very inspiring. And I like the communion bread!

The best part of fifth grade is all the freedom we get. We get to eat snacks during the day and we're allowed to sit where we want and bring toys or fidgets. I love seeing the little kids in kindergarten because me and my friends help with bus duty.

My favorite part of going to church is listening to the sermons because they relate the stories to real life. I like it when I get to sit with friends and listen to the praise band and choir.

I'm a Lutheran for life!

Now if a 5th grader can do this, we can! Let's go and be a witness!
Amen