

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
April 17/18, 2021  
Year B: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter: Luke 24:36b-48  
Rev. Debra Abbott

***Luke 24:36b-48***

*<sup>36</sup>While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” <sup>37</sup>They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>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.” <sup>40</sup>And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup>While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate in their presence. <sup>44</sup>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.” <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>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, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things.*

One of the rules I live by is if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. I follow this rule to protect myself because I am pretty gullible. On April Fool’s Day I always end up believing some outrageous story that isn’t true. I spend far too much time listening to sales people on my doorstep, usually to be polite. And I read endless stories and reviews online trying to discern if one product or another is really the best thing I will ever own and will make my life better.

We know that companies and products and people, especially people, aren’t always who or what they say they are.

And because we know this, even expect this, we tend to doubt first until we are convinced. We train our children to doubt, to ask questions, to be critical thinkers. These are qualities that we admire and encourage.

Whether we are listening to a sales person or politician, stranger or friend we ask questions before we follow or believe. Questions like, “Is that really true? Will she keep that promise? Is he really who he says he is?”

So we should feel right at home in this Easter season as we hear stories each week of Jesus’ appearances after his resurrection.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection he appears to the women, the disciples including Thomas and many others.

And what happens. Jesus is greeted with fear and questions and doubt. We don’t have any accounts of the disciples greeting Jesus when he comes to them saying something like, “Hey Jesus, we’ve been waiting for you and we knew you would come!”

Nope. Jesus appears to the disciples and they are afraid. They’re not sure who he is. A ghost? A figment of their imagination? It is unbelievable to them that Jesus is standing right there in front of them.

Jesus asks them, “Why do doubts arise in your hearts?” And then Jesus shows them his scars.

But the gospel of Luke tells us that even then the disciples still aren’t quite sure it’s Jesus. “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.”

Of course they were. Who would ever expect resurrection? Who is able to completely wrap their brain or heart around the fact that Jesus died and then rose from the tomb?

They want to believe it’s Jesus but his resurrection is beyond their understanding.

Not a lot has changed in 2000 years. People of faith continue to ask questions about Jesus’ resurrection.

It’s hard to believe what we cannot understand. And resurrection is not something we expect or understand. Jesus’ presence with his disciples and with us here today defies logic. It all seems too good to be true.

David Lose, President of Philadelphia Seminary and one of my favorite preachers, says that, “Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Doubt, in fact, is probably a necessary ingredient to faith. Faith, by definition, is trust in spite of a lack of evidence. Faith is not knowledge. Faith is more tension-filled. It is acting as if something is true even when you have no proof that it is.”

The good news for us today is that resurrection is not dependent on us or what we believe. God has done that work for us. Jesus defeated death and rose from the grave. He comes to us bringing the promise of new life when we doubt and when we have faith.

What does Jesus do when he sees his disciples doubt and hears their questions?

He says, “Peace be with you.” And Jesus eats with them. And then he opens up the scriptures for them and teaches them.

In all that he does and says, Jesus is revealing himself to the disciples. He shows himself to the doubters. He welcomes the questions.

Jesus doesn’t yell at his disciples. He doesn’t say he is disappointed in them or that they don’t have enough faith to be his disciples. And he doesn’t leave them without another word.

Instead he offers peace, eats a meal with them as they had done together hundreds of times and then teaches them and opens up their hearts.

And if we listen closely, we just might find our own life of faith and discipleship in this story. This is a model for discipleship that meets us where we are and reveals Jesus in our midst as well.

In Luke, the disciples are gathered together and Jesus comes to them. They are afraid, they have questions and they have doubts. Jesus meets them right where they are.

We too come together in Christian community bringing our fears and questions and doubts. We do this in small groups and big groups, on-line and in person, in silence and in conversation, in prayer and in worship, even in parking lots. In our community of faith, in all the ways we are community, Jesus comes to us with a word and spirit of peace.

The disciples listened as Jesus opened up God's Word for them. They engaged, they asked questions, they heard God's promises.

When we gather for worship or bible study or prayer or service the gospel is proclaimed. The good news of God's saving love and continued work in our lives is shared with us just as it was for those first disciples.

A part of discipleship, of being a follower of Jesus, is that we come together in Christian community for worship and study and prayer and fellowship and service. We come together in doubt and in faith to give space for God to open our hearts to hear the Word, be nourished by the Sacraments, pray for our neighbors and ourselves, and then be sent out into the world as witnesses.

So in our doubt and in our faith we are not alone. Those first disciples remind us today that even when Jesus was standing in front of them they thought the resurrection was too good to be true. "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering..."

The good news of Easter, the promise of resurrection and new life is unbelievable and amazing. It's not surprising at all that we have story after story of doubt and disbelief in our faith tradition.

We need to continue to find ways and offer opportunities for questions to be asked and doubts to be shared in our community of faith. Because Jesus meets us there, listening to our questions and offering peace and hope when it is hardest to imagine.

These are wonderful gifts that our Lord has given us. The gift of doubt and wonder and the gift of joy and hope. The gift us his presence with us when we are alone or gathered together.

Ultimately the promise of Easter, the promise of Jesus' resurrection, is that each one of us has been given the gift of new life. And in this new life we are transformed because death has been defeated, sin has been forgiven, love has won.

It's a story that sounds too good to be true. But it is true. Jesus loves you and he loves me and he will never leave us or let anything, even death, separate us from the love of God. Hold on to that good news. Amen.