

Luke 24:36b-48 Bill Uetracht 4.11.24 3 Easter

I had a woman talk with me a couple of weeks ago about some very serious issues that she was facing. At the end of our conversation, I said to her that she could call me any time, and I would be available to help. Well, this past Tuesday at three in the morning, I got a call. And it was this woman. I was really worried about what was going on and, frankly, a little irritated that she got me up from a sound sleep. She said, "Pastor, I just can't sleep." I answered, "What would you like me to do about it?" She responded, "Preach to me a while and then I will be able to fall asleep." Well, I think I am offended!!

Most of you know that I spent this past week with my son in New York city. In many ways, we are very much alike, although I have a lot more hair. One of our similarities is that we truly love food. Man, did we have some good food together. My favorites included hot figs from a Guatemalan restaurant, an amazing collection of salads, meats, vegetables (no beets, of course) from an Uzbekistani grocery, and my all-time favorite, an eggplant concoction, an amazing chicken dish, and a falafel pizza from a Palestinian restaurant. Oh, it all was so good.

As a lover of food, I suppose you can understand why I am a bit amused by Luke's post-resurrection story today. Jesus had just appeared to some disciples as they were slipping off to some warm wells in Emmaus, after having had a really rough week in Jerusalem. At first, these disciples didn't recognize Jesus. They didn't know who was accompanying them. He then began to talk to them about the scriptures, which took them to a deeper place, opened their minds, and placed their lives in some kind of bigger story. But they didn't fully grasp who he was until they ate and drank with him. In the breaking of the bread, he was revealed to them.

And now in Luke it is evening on Easter day, the disciples are together, and Jesus appears again, saying, “Shalom, peace be with you.” The disciples think they are seeing a ghost which causes Jesus to ask: “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is me. Touch me. See me. Ghosts don’t have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

After saying this, Jesus showed them his hands and his feet. Boy, this sure sounds like John’s story about Thomas and his so-called doubt. Maybe Luke and John have similar sources. Who knows for sure?

But while the disciples are trying to figure this all out, Jesus asks, “Hey, anybody got something to eat?” I love it. The biggest event of world history occurs, and Jesus wants a snack. Maybe some chocolate, baklava, Brussel sprouts, hummus. Who knows?

I remember a time in my previous ministry in Toledo when I showed up at the Bliss household; Burt had just died. When I walked into the house, people were scattered throughout it, grieving intensely. I walked into the bedroom where Evelyn, Burt’s wife, was. She was on her knees, crying, obviously in deep pain. When she saw me, she stood up and immediately said, “Would you like something to eat? How about a beer?” I couldn’t help but laugh. Here something life-changing had occurred, and Evelyn wanted me to have a beer!

Luke’s message is quite clear. The resurrected Jesus isn’t a ghost. He isn’t a spirit. He isn’t an idea. He isn’t a concept. He is a person. He is a body. Resurrected life is embodied life. You and I don’t live our lives apart from our bodies. Physical, ordinary, concrete life is where God is, where resurrection is experienced. Tom Driver says that the gospel is good news for the body, or it is not good news at all.

Matter matters and matter is good. Food matters, and it is good. Sexuality and sexual pleasure matter, and they are good. Ordinary conversations around the dinner table matter, and they are good. Life is not an ethereal encounter with an idea or a spiritual never-never land. Life is not to be lived simply in the head. Life is to be danced. Life involves rhythm, movement. There is a drumbeat to life, which so longs for us to participate in it, so longs for us to clap to it, so longs for us to pulsate with it. Life demands bodily engagement. Life is to be eaten. Life is to be laughed at, laughed at heartily and robustly. Life is to be touched, heard, seen, tasted. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Anybody have something to eat? Here, Bill, have a beer. Real, embodied physical life is not to be spurned. It is to be embraced. The gospel is good news for bodies, or it is not good news at all.

The Bible, as it describes the next life, as it deals with what would be called life beyond death, does not do so in terms of souls. For most New Testament writers, especially for Paul, life beyond death is talked about as a matter of raised bodies. The early church was convinced that the resurrection of Jesus was a foretaste of what is going to happen to all of us. Jesus as the resurrected one is described as the “first fruits.” He is the *first* one to be raised, and then we will be raised.

Now what all of that looks like is a mystery to me. Frankly, I see problems with this resurrection vision. It almost feels like a Zombie movie to me. Raised bodies walking all around the place. And what if my ashes were scattered all over? God has a lot of work to do to bring them all back together in order to form a new body and raise it. I understand why people talk about the next life in terms of souls. It’s just more logical. But the people who wrote the Bible were for the most part Jews who believed strongly in the goodness of

creation. If God created everything good, he is not going to destroy his good creation. He is going to renew it, to bring it to a great and final future. Revelation speaks of a new heaven and a new *earth*. The gospel is good news for the body and all of creation, or it is not good news at all.

You know, ancient people, Biblical writers in particular, gave us visions of the final future so that we might live in the present differently. A vision of a bodily future (resurrection) causes us to reflect more fully on this embodied, physical, concrete, everyday, life. It is here, this earthly, ordinary life where God is at work, at work bringing life out of death. It is here where Christ shows up. He shows up in real bread and wine. He shows up in real water. He shows up as real people preach real words. He shows up as real people gather around food and beers, as they laugh together, as they cry together, as they live and die together. He shows up in community, time and time again.

It is interesting to note what the snack-needing, fish-crunching Jesus says his showing up is all about. After he tells his disciples that what has happened in him, his death and resurrection, is a part of a whole big story, a big narrative that includes the hopes and dreams of his people throughout time, he says this: “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”

This big narrative (what scholars call “Luke’s salvation history”) is about the opportunity for real live people with real live stories in real places to start all over again. Community, where the raised Jesus keeps showing up, is about the chance for a second, third, fourth, fifth start. Without a doubt, we regularly turn our backs on

love, but we are given the opportunity for a new start, an opportunity to let love lead us now. This opportunity is called repentance.

And what makes the new start, what makes repentance possible? According to Luke's Jesus, the forgiveness of sins. The word for forgiveness in Luke is the word for release. In the God met in the resurrected Jesus, we are released from the power of the past to determine our future. The past that made us angry, the past that made us bitter, caused by the actions of others or even of ourselves, does not have the power to determine our future. We are freed from that power. Anger, bitterness, hatred, unforgiveness do not have to shape our lives. We are set free for a whole new future.

Ooh for me, that means some dancing, some moving, some eating together, some singing, some clapping, some laughing. The gospel is good news for bodies, for hands, for your bellies, your chests, your voice boxes, your faces, or it is not good news at all.