

“Can I Get a Witness”
3rd Sunday of Easter (B)
Luke 24.36-49

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Grace Lutheran Church
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In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

On this Third Sunday in our Easter celebration, we gather once again with Jesus’ disciples who are startled and terrified. During these fifteen of the fifty days of Easter, we’ve already heard of the women in Mark who were very afraid and about the disciples in John who locked themselves in a room. Last Sunday was when we heard about Thomas, the believing one, who wanted to see the marks in Jesus’ hands and to touch Jesus’ side.

This morning our Easter celebration continues as we turn to Luke and to his account of the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord. We pick up after Jesus has appeared to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus and has broken bread with them. We pick up as Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, and some of what we hear sounds an awful lot like John’s account that we heard last week.

- Jesus greets the disciples with peace just as he greeted the disciples in John’s gospel twice with this same phrase: Peace be with you.
- Jesus calms their fears. In John, Jesus breathes upon the disciples the Holy Spirit. In Luke, Jesus rebukes their anxiety that he is a ghost by eating some fish and by reminding them of the scriptural evidence in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms.
- In Luke, like John, Jesus extends an invitation to touch his hands and his feet, but here in Luke, it’s to all of the disciples gathered. And his invitation says nothing of his wounds. For Thomas in John’s gospel, Jesus offered the scars. But Luke tells it differently. The disciples’ fear of their ghost-sighting is settled when Jesus offers his hands and his feet with no mention of the wounds at all. The important thing here in this gospel is that Jesus is not a ghost. Jesus is not just a spirit. Jesus is indeed alive.

After showing off his bodily resurrection, Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures and he says to them, “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, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

Luke describes the Jerusalem disciples as disbelieving and wondering but doing so in their joy, “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering...” Luke writes.

This seems like a mix of emotions or thoughts here: disbelieving and wondering and joyful? Jesus’ appearance in Jerusalem was shortly after the resurrection. It’s the same day when the disciples see the risen Lord. Their teacher had suffered, died, and rose from the dead. That’s a lot to digest. While disbelieving and wondering and being joyful might seem in conflict, given the complexity of circumstances, Luke’s description here is not only vivid, it also seems quite honest.

And so here we are this morning, in River Forest, Illinois, almost two thousand years later. I wonder, for us River Forest disciples, or Oak Park disciples, or Chicagoland disciples, what is behind our joy this morning? What finds us wondering or disbelieving?

While I suspect few of us are fishermen...or have had any recent ghost-busting experiences, and I suspect few of us locked ourselves in rooms after Easter Sunday or ran from church very afraid...Our joy, like those Jerusalem disciples, has baggage behind it.

There is of course, fear for the economy and the rising unemployment rate. And whether it has really affected your household or not, the buzz in media and down the block or the next pew over is enough to heavy our emotional load. Joy is joy, but financial worry might linger underneath.

Perhaps you come to our Easter celebration with fear and worry about your health, or the health of a loved one or dear friend. It seems our prayer list is never growing shorter here at Grace, but rather week after week, we receive more and more prayer requests for those with new diagnoses or for those who mourn. Our Easter joy is accompanied by concern.

In their joy, the disciples were disbelieving and still wondering. And we wonder too, no matter what age or gender or financial or health condition we are in. We wonder about the exams we take at school and if the retirement funds will last. We wonder about our children, our parents, our biological and chosen families. We come to this morning with wonder. Some come with disbelief. But hopefully, hopefully, we also come with joy.

Those first disciples wondering and afraid and even joyful, Jesus calls *them* to be his witnesses. "You are witnesses to these things," Jesus says. You are witnesses to my ministry, my life, my suffering, my death, my resurrection, Jesus tells them. Even in your wonder and in your disbelief, in your denial and your doubt, you are witnesses.

And so here we are this morning, in River Forest, Illinois, almost two thousand years later, joyful, wondering, afraid, and we hear the same words and commissioning that Jesus gives to those first disciples: "You are witnesses to these things." Witnessing to Jesus takes on different forms. And whether we are 8th grade Confirmation students or we are in our nineties and headed to yet another doctor's appointment, we are witnesses to God's love and life and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

- You are witnesses. For the disciples in Luke's gospel it begins after Jesus' appearances in Emmaus and Jerusalem.
- You are witnesses. For us, it begins in baptism when we are named as God's children and therefore as witnesses to this love and life and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.
- You are witnesses. Just as Jesus ate with those first disciples and revealed the scriptures to them, we are nourished at this table and in this place by weekly word and sacrament.
- You are witnesses. In reading the witness statements that our 8th Graders have been writing and preparing to present this coming Thursday, I've been wondering what I would say in my witness statement. And I wonder what you might say in yours.

We ask our young people to create a witness statement *once* as part of their preparation for Confirmation, but as witnesses of God's love and life and forgiveness in the living Jesus Christ, our witness statement is really never finished. It doesn't mean we come up with another 600-900 word essay, but it does mean that we live confidently with the joy of Easter, knowing that Christ is risen and calls us to be his witnesses in the world.

Unbelieving and wondering, joyful too, you are witnesses. To the glory of God.