

“TOUCH ME AND SEE”

Luke 24:36b-48

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Resurrection is not about a ghost, holy or otherwise. Even after the women testified to the resurrection of Jesus, after Peter’s observation about the empty tomb and linen cloths, and after the witness of Cleopas and his friend of the revelation of the risen Christ in the breaking of bread, the disciples still think they’re seeing a ghost.

Other than the Apostles Creed, we don’t talk much about the Holy Ghost. We have a decided preference for the Holy Spirit because we do believe in spiritual things. But, in one sense, the resurrection is not about spirits either, holy or otherwise.

The resurrection, in this account, is about “flesh and bones,” about “eating” and presumably drinking. We have a tendency during the Easter season to “spiritualize” resurrection, to treat it as a metaphor for a new quality of life. Perhaps we are expecting to feel closer to God, to have a more effective prayer life, to better understand the scriptures. But it’s clear that when Jesus shows up, he isn’t recruiting for the heavenly choir or preparing the disciples for the entry exam into paradise. He appears in order to establish that he is alive, having flesh and bones, just like his friends.

The challenge of the gospel for us is that we do not experience Jesus in this way. We do not share our dinner with him. We are not given the opportunity to touch him and see... that he is alive. As you heard last week, we belong to the group who are “blessed and have not seen.” I hope you will remember what Pastor Groenenboom said about the relationship between doubt and the growth of our faith. I want to add to that the importance of “touching and seeing” for the resurrected life.

As a Matthew 25 congregation, we believe that we encounter Jesus in the hungry, among those without shelter, in people without adequate clothing. We believe that Jesus resides with the sick, the imprisoned, and the oppressed. The closer we get to these people, the nearer we are to Jesus. That’s what we believe as a congregation.

One of the things that volunteering in the warming center has made clear to me is that I have not understood the flesh and blood life of the unhoused. You’ve heard what’s been said about the homeless. Homeless people have mental health or alcohol problems. Homeless people are homeless because they want to be homeless. Homeless people can be dangerous. Homeless people are messy. Homeless people won’t help themselves. Some of these things are true of some homeless people, but we say them as generalizations that distance us from a whole class of people. When we define people by their problems, we demonize them and fail to see their flesh and bones life, their stories.

At the warming center, I met people with a college education and people working on their GED. I had deep conversations about faith and wonderings about how God must see the world. I met people grateful for a cup of coffee and a simple meal, who were grateful to be

out of the rain, people who understood the gift of a shower, a quiet place to be, and an opportunity to play pickleball.

Did we solve any problems? A few, small ones, perhaps? Mostly we began the process of tearing down the wall that prevents us from seeing the unhoused as flesh and blood people. Instead of seeing ghosts, we began to see persons with a name who could take as much pleasure in a grilled cheese sandwich as we do.

“Touch me and see,” says Jesus to his disciples. Scott Hagley and Karen Rohrer, in the *Christian Century* says this about Willie Jennings commentary on this passage: “Jesus presents himself to be touched. He shares in the physicality of the creature by sharing food and conversation around the table. Perhaps the church, Jennings says, also exists to be touched by the world. We are not set apart from the world, a theological tax-exempt status, but rather set apart for the world” (p.43).

One of the comments made by a participant at the warming center reflected his appreciation that volunteers treated him like a “human being.” Sharing food and conversation around tables helped us, all of us, set aside assumptions we might have brought with us, and begin to see each other. Hagley and Rohrer remind us in his article: “Being Christian in the world is not a given but a task of ongoing theological discernment, because ours is a faith centered on the radical insistence that the Word became flesh and dwells among us” (p. 43). Birth and rebirth, incarnation and resurrection, Christmas and Easter deliver the same message: God intends to dwell among us in our world, on this planet. Touch me and see. We are not being offered an escape from the world. Within the faith community we find nurture and peace and joy, but it is not for ourselves alone. “In and with Christ,” writes Rohrer and Hagley, “we are called to share in the structures of our world – and removing ourselves from them robs us of our calling, our purpose, and our future.”

Resurrection living takes place in the world. It happens in our bodies, not just our spirits. It’s visible to anyone who cares to come close enough. And it belongs not just to the faith community. Resurrection is for the world. It’s happening with our art festival. Our vision for earth care is more and more being embraced by the community of local artists and poets. 68 people submitted 103 works of art and poetry for this year’s festival, all of them either celebrating the earth or calling us to do a better job of loving it.

The images are concrete: trees, lakes, rocks, plants. A number of them celebrate “rootedness” in a more general, but no less concrete way, emphasizing family and human communities. Flesh and blood, engagement with real life, looking for new life. Our faith isn’t offering escape from the world. It’s calling us to love the world. Resurrected living is loving the world, the world in which God chooses to dwell.

We know this in Jesus, and we know it in our own lives, in the Christ who dwells within us, and in the lives of others in whom Christ can be found. We are not looking for ghosts, but for the living Christ, revealed in food and conversations around the table, discovered in you, me, and so many others around the table. Draw near and see the Christ who is alive today. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!! Amen.

Resources:

“Ministry and Other Difficult Jobs” by Scott Hagley and Karen Rohrer. In *The Christian Century* April 2024