

WOUNDED HEALER

Our scripture passage this morning begins a bit enigmatically with the phrase, “While they were talking about these things...” OK, what were they talking about? In Luke’s timeline, they were talking about the events of that first Easter day that was still unfolding. In Luke’s account, women go to the tomb on Sunday morning. The stone is rolled back, and two men in dazzling clothes announce that Jesus was raised. The women return and report the news to the disciples and the rest, but their report seemed to be an “idle tale” and was not believed. Peter, however, ran to the tomb and confirmed that it was empty. On that same day, two from the group of followers of Jesus were going to Emmaus when they encounter, but do not recognize, Jesus. They express their disappointed hope that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel, but Jesus explains how everything that happened was necessary according to Scripture. The two invite Jesus to spend the night with them. During the meal, when Jesus blessed and broke the bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus, but he vanished from their sight. They rush back to Jerusalem and report to the gathered believers what had happened and discover that Jesus had already appeared to Simon. And then the story picks up with our passage this morning, “While they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

What follows may remind you of last Sunday’s lesson from the gospel of John. Seeing the disciples startled and terrified, and thinking they were seeing a ghost, Jesus invites them to look at and touch his hands and feet, and then Jesus asks for something to eat. Now, this may initially sound like a redo of the Emmaus encounter in which the resurrected Jesus met a couple disciples on the road ends up eating with them, and takes the bread and blesses and breaks it. In the Emmaus encounter the point seems to be eucharistic or communion related. It reminds us that every meal, as one commentator has noted, “has the potential of being an event in which hospitality and table fellowship can become sacred occasions.” I am reminded of my experience in seminary when the predominantly Roman Catholic group of classmates I regularly ate with would always pause, individually, before partaking of a meal – a moment of prayer and reflection that consciously made space for a divine encounter in the midst of a routine meal.

Country western performer Thomas Rhett takes it a step further when he sings,

If I could have a beer with Jesus
Heaven knows I'd sip it nice and slow
I'd try to pick a place that ain't too crowded
Or gladly go wherever he wants to go

You can bet I'd order up a couple tall ones
Tell the waitress put 'em on my tab
I'd be sure to let him do the talkin'
Careful when I got the chance to ask

How'd you turn the other cheek
To save a sorry soul like me
Do you hear the prayers I send
What happens when life ends
And when you think you're comin' back again
I'd tell everyone, but no one would believe it
If I could have a beer with Jesus

[your homework this afternoon is to look up “Beer with Jesus” on YouTube and give it a listen.]

The early Emmaus dining with Jesus experience has a focus on relationships around meals. The second encounter with Jesus involving food has a different emphasis. As Christian Century editor Peter Marty notes:

They hand him a piece of broiled fish, and he chews and swallows it, right then and there. If the disciples are looking for God to be some wispy spiritual being, or philosophical concept, or metaphor, or ghost, what they get instead is the Lord of heaven and earth chewing on tilapia Galilaea. Their God and ours proves to be a flesh and blood God, not a dismembered spirit. This God is vulnerable to everything that is human, including the capability of being hurt and spilling tears. Not a ghoulie or ghostie at all, God is at home in the flesh, wearing everything from bones and nerve endings to taste buds and a digestive tract.

In his eating of broiled fish, Jesus demonstrates that he is fleshy – corporeal.

So, why does this matter? I think Barbara Brown Taylor answers right on target,

[noting] the importance of Jesus’ showing the disciples his hands and feet so that they might recall where he had been and what he had done (healing people, breaking bread, traveling with the good news). [These hands and feet] were wounded now - a demonstration that he (Jesus) had gone through danger and not around it.

“He had gone through danger and not around it.” And had been wounded by it – like us. Vicki and I have been watching the entire Avengers series of films - some 20 plus movies – in chronological narrative order and we just finished the final one last night. The Avengers, while providing wonderful escapism during a pandemic, are not like us. They all have either some super power, or specially engineered gadget, or some ridiculous amount of hand to hand combat training. They get wounded, and – spoiler alert – sometimes even die. But they are not like us. In the Avengers films, people like us are simply spectators or even collateral damage. Jesus is not an Avenger. He is standing with us. In our most joyful times and in our most tragic moments. Nadia Bolz-Weber reflecting on Holy Week comments:

... I would contend that through the cross we know that God *isn't* standing smugly at a distance but that God's abundant grace is hiding in, with, and under all this broken [junk] in the world around us.

God is present with us in all of it.

And while the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross is not *about* you. It is certainly FOR you.

In fact, God is so *for* you that there is no place God will not go to be *with* you. Nothing separates you from the love of God in Jesus...not insults, not betrayal, not suffering, and as we will see at Easter – not even death itself.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. You are with me. This fleshy, hungry, wounded yet resurrected Jesus is with us, every step of the way, walking with us through danger and despair and even death itself. And inviting us, fellow “wounded healers” to go to our fellow wounded and walk with them. As one commentator puts it,

Rather than a disembodied, spiritualized version of “love wins,” maybe the Risen Christ is just as inconvenient, and even more down to earth, than that troublemaker Jesus of Nazareth.

He is the single mother waiting in line at the soup kitchen, the innocent man wasting away behind bars, the bullied trans kid desperate for acceptance. The Risen Christ is the refugee family swimming against the tide, the exhausted parent trying to do it all, the addict struggling to get clean, the unhoused person begging for spare change.

The Risen Christ is your least favorite, most annoying, always-hungry acquaintance. Do you have anything to eat?

As we emerge from COVID, where are you, where is First Church walking and standing? Are we standing with those wounded by yet more abuse and death of a child or person of color as the result of a traffic stop? Are standing with the stigmatized refugee or immigrant? Are we standing with the poor, the homeless, the marginalized, the vulnerable? Are we standing with God’s creation wounded by climate change? Where are we standing?

At the conclusion of our passage this morning Jesus commissions the disciples beginning with these words, “You are witnesses to these things.” How are you witnessing, through your very life, through simple meals, through mundane encounters, through courageous words? Where are your hands and feet taking you? What is it that the Lord has sent you to do?

AMEN.