

Luke 24: 36b - 48

NPMC

April 14, 2024

Now What? Life after Resurrection

Grace to you and peace in the name of Creator God, the Son Jesus Christ and the Spirit of the Living One. May this day of worship and resurrection be a blessing on our lives. In the ancient church Jesus' followers celebrated every Sunday as a day of resurrection. Jesus' rising was a weekly remembrance! Wouldn't that be a unique way of approaching worship every Sunday: a mini-Easter, the power of life over death?

It has been some time since I stood before you to preach. However as many of you know that has not stopped me from launching into bouts of preachiness over the last years! It is a privilege and delight to share some thoughts about our congregation today in light of this story from the Gospel of Luke on this second Sunday after Easter.

None of us should take for granted that we are here, together, today. Many things have happened in the last while that have changed our lives a great deal. Some, who once were a part of this congregation are no longer living. And, of course, this is the cycle of life. Little ones are born and some of us die. However, the ravages of Covid have altered our connectedness and there are those whose deaths have slipped by us in these last four years because we couldn't gather as we are used to and in some sense we got out of the habit. We can enumerate the losses and disruptions that have impacted us during and since the pandemic. We have lived through and survived a global contagion! That in itself is shocking and disorienting if you

stop to reflect back a couple of years. The consequences have been monumental!

Some folks have departed our congregational life for various other reasons. However, this body of believers is not a dying body. It is a changing body. We now have many joining us online at various times because we have a tech team that has stepped up Sunday after Sunday and has made live streaming a reality! How grateful we are for such skill, knowledge and willingness to keep us connected. But so, so much has changed. Therefore, I pose the questions to us all, "Now what?" Where are we going? Here we are two Sundays after Easter, Post-resurrection, Post-Covid, Post-Susanne. What are we to do now? Who are we now?

I believe the story that we read today, of Jesus and the disciples together, after resurrection, gives us some clues as to who we are and how we might envision our future as Nutana Park Mennonite Church. We read of the dear disciples hunkered down, just days after Jesus dies, keeping a low profile not sure whether they might be the next targets of the religious gatekeepers' wrath. Three days in and they are coming to terms with Jesus' death, so you can imagine that they are scared out of their wits when Jesus suddenly shows up in the place where they are hiding. Here he is, in the flesh! As they are freaking out Jesus reminds them that he did tell them that he would die **and rise**. Who knows if the disciples even remembered his prophetic words from earlier. What a mystery...Jesus showing up like this. They are thrilled to see him but mightily confused, disoriented.

And what does Jesus do as the poor disciples are trying to process this? He asks for something to eat! Isn't that weird?? Think about it. We are so used to hearing the story that we just take it as a matter of course. But these are the last precious encounters that Jesus has with his people, as Luke writes the story. They are, we are, anxious to know what happened, this rising after dying, and what comes next. What is the future going to be? ...and Jesus asks for something to eat. What could possibly be the point of eating at a time like this? Of all the things we would like to know about why Jesus is standing there, we are talking about food!

We have spent 2000 years trying to discern how to be faithful to a risen Jesus and he asks for food as one of his final conversations with the world. Really? I want to know what I am supposed to do now, after resurrection. Don't tell me that you are hungry. AHA! There you have it! Jesus has need of food, of hospitality, of care. He wants to eat in the company of his friends before he goes on.

OK, but why does Jesus not explain more about his rising and give concrete instructions for the future? Wouldn't that make life so much easier for us: a clear guide as to how to act, what to do and when to do it? Well, I read a wonderful response to this question a few months ago and I have been saving it to share with you. And then Patrick quotes the article a couple of weeks ago! And I am thinking "Patrick, you beat me to it." But he didn't. He went off on another tangent. I digress.

In an article from the Christian Century journal, Mac Loftin writes about a theologian named Michel de Certeau who comments on the implications of

an empty tomb and this really caught my imagination. I quote Loftin as he reflects on the 1970s writing of Michel de Certeau:

Jesus did not set down a full and final account of who he is and what his life and death mean...Instead he handed his story over to others. Withdrawing from history, he makes room for a breathtaking diversity of texts and communities that will tell of the changes and transformations that he awakened in them. And our access to Jesus is always mediated through these responses. We cannot hear, see, touch him directly; instead, we hear stories of him told to us by others, see the transformations worked in people's lives by their responding to his call, touch those whose lives have been touched in an endless chain of responses. (*Mac Loftin, "A better response to the decline of the Christian West", Christian Century, September 2023, p. 58*)

Wow! Jesus makes room for our stories! He doesn't nail it down, so to speak, but withdraws from history to let us or most likely, force us, to figure out what comes next. We hear the stories of others and that changes us. Others hear our stories and that changes them: all in the spirit of Jesus who awakens transformation in our lives. And this is an endless chain of witness from one person to another, one generation to another, one movement, one denomination, one body of believers to another. And this process is diverse and intentional! It is inclusive and forward-looking! In other words, nothing stays the same for long. We are always re-imagining Jesus' life and witness by sharing our stories and living our stories. We continue to change it up so that Jesus' desire for the world is understood and experienced. That is what Jesus leaves us, not detailed instruction, rather, room for stories, for our stories!

So, how do we as the people of Nutana Park continue to envision our life into the future? It seems that eating together is the leading event, the opening act of what it means to be church. We enjoy that here. Potlucks, special events, funeral lunches, coffee times are all a part of what we do together. But it becomes something much more than that. Sitting down around a table and eating together is an intimate act. Inviting others to your table, into your home, into your space, opens new opportunities for conversation and relationship. So much of what Jesus and later the apostles did was to eat together with strangers and Gentiles, the Other. Here is a clue: extend hospitality wherever you find yourself. That may mean merely a smile and meeting the eye of someone who does not expect to be greeted. It may mean a host of other initiatives: volunteering where the community has need, standing with those who are being sidelined... You know the drill. These are acts of hospitality that make a difference. That is simply what Jesus did and it continues to be what we do.

Other clues are found in Jesus' words to his disciples. He intimates that something has changed since his death: "while I was still with you." He uses these words to signal a disruption in the world order. Before, "while I was still with you", I tried to explain to you who I was. And now after the cataclysmic event of his rising, Jesus shows his disciples once again how he fits into the long history of Israel's relationship with God. Repentance and forgiveness have been the story of God with God's people. Now that relationship is going global. The message is for everyone! So once again, we take our cue from Jesus' words. His ministry of repentance and forgiveness of sins is passed on, to the disciples at that moment in the story, and to all those who are

“witnesses of these things”, who are witnesses to his work throughout the whole world and for all time... .and that includes us, today!

I think that when we understand the role of repentance in life, when there is a desire to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, we can change the world. Repentance is a recognition that we are human, that we make mistakes despite our best intentions and admit that we are in need of forgiveness and redemption. It is an honest, responsible, peace-filled way of living. And forgiveness is a way of being in the world that allows us and others the freedom to move on. Repentance and forgiveness are complex and multi-faceted. I am not saying that this is easy. However, that is what Jesus passes on to the world and leaves it to us to determine how we might embody this way of being. Imagine what a dose of repentance and forgiveness could do in the highest places of leadership in the world conflicts of this moment.

I close by leaving us with a big dose of encouragement, I hope, which is what we do when we meet Sunday mornings. We meet to be inspired and encouraged! We have within our community the knowledge and desire to extend ourselves to the world through all manner of hospitality, through an openness to being real about what human beings need in the world and to be of a forgiving nature. That simply, encapsulates the love of God, the witness of Jesus the Son through the ongoing work and blessing of the Holy Spirit. Here at Nutana Park we will continue to work together to be a people of inclusion, advocacy, forgiveness and joy! Peace be with you all. AMEN