

April 25/26, 2009 (Easter 3)
Touch Me and See
Luke 24:36-48
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Jesus had a very busy day. It was Easter and Jesus had already made three appearances. According to John's Gospel, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in the early morning. Later that day, according to Luke, he appears to two of his friends walking to Emmaus. So, these two guys are now telling the others about seeing Jesus, when Jesus appears to them a third time.

And I thought I had a busy Easter ...

He greets his friends with "I come in peace" ... because they're terrified ... and then he says, "So don't be afraid." And then he says, "You got anything to eat?" That's one of my favorite verses in all of scripture. "You got anything to eat?"

By his third visit, he's famished. Resurrection is hard work.

Jesus fits in well around here. I swear, every time we gather for a meeting or a class or we stare at empty donut boxes on Sunday morning, someone will ask, "you got anything to eat?" For those of you that are visiting today, this shows that we are a biblically-based church.

These friends and followers of Jesus – they’re terrified. Scared half to death! And the risen Christ stands before them and says, “You got anything to eat?”

What is this all about?

And they do ... have something to eat. A piece of fish. Broiled fish. And he eats it. In front of them.

Why is this such an important part of the story? Why does he ask for something to eat?

Many believers will tell you – this is it. This is the proof that Jesus was resurrected.

Think about it. He’s dead. Or he’s supposed to be. Dead men don’t eat fish.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, says this is one of the most important parts of the Gospel of Luke. This is a turning point in the scripture. Jesus doesn’t eat because he’s hungry; he eats to give his friends – those closest to him – further evidence that he is alive and well.

Jesus invites his friends to view his hands and his feet. He invites them to reach out and touch him. They most certainly view his hands and feet, but no one reaches out to touch him. Maybe that was just too much for those

witnessing this event. But he ate the fish. Is that proof enough that God is alive and well.

Jesus eats to reassure his friends that he's not a ghost.

I, too, eat to reassure my friends that I'm alive and well. And if you ever question that, just simply provide me with a chocolate malt or a Reese's peanut butter cup blizzard ...

We often forget – or fail to understand the pain – that these friends of Jesus saw the horrific event of execution. They witnessed the death of Jesus. They witnessed the hard reality of losing someone they love. They watched as the stone was rolled in front of the tomb. They understood the end of life.

Though they probably wanted to die, they lived. And they lived in fear. They lived in fear because they were followers and friends of the one who was executed. Were they next?

And then crazy things started happening. Crazier than it used to be. They started seeing Jesus. And he's alive. It's too good to be true.

My brother Rob moved away from home the day after he graduated from high school. He moved to Montana ... far enough away. My mother painfully missed him, because after all, he is her favorite, I'm sure of it – so about 4 yrs after his move, my older brother & I concocted a plan. We'd fly him home for Xmas, surprising my parents. A few days before Xmas Rob flew into Milwaukee, staying with my brother Dan who lived there until

Xmas morning. They arrived at my parents' home at about 3 in the morning, sneaking Rob into the house, where he parked himself under the Xmas tree, immediately falling asleep. My little brother Tom wasn't in on the plan and we wanted to surprise him as well. He was young at the time and still very excited about getting up early on Xmas morning to see the bounty of his gifts and start ripping open presents. And Tom was the first one up. He flew down the stairs, rounded the corner into what we called the music room, where the Xmas tree stood and nearly had a stroke. There, to his amazement, was Rob, asleep under the tree. But not for long, because Tom screamed and screamed. "He's here. He's here." In all the excitement and chaos, Rob nearly knocked over the tree when he jumped up, my dad grabbed a baseball bat thinking we had an intruder, and my mother stood in the doorway of that room and swooned.

It was too good to be true that my mother would have all her children home for Christmas. She was so surprised and had so many questions: How? Why? When? After the interrogation was over and he was bruised from allowing my mother to pinch and hug him, I am almost certain Rob said, "You got anything to eat?"

Surprise. Amazement. Disbelief. Too good to be true. The one I love is standing right in front of me. God is alive and well.

I am not prepared to argue with anyone about whether those disciples saw Jesus on that Easter day. Did he really eat that piece of fish? Did they really talk to him? They were so sad and disappointed and frustrated and they were grieving ... and isn't it true that in the intensity of grief the human

imagination expands; that we see and experience all sorts of weird and wonderful things?

I do know this: The story of a resurrected Christ – what I call the real presence of God among us – has saved me from my own intensity of grief, my own intensity of pain, doubt, fear, and the demons I have created. The real presence of God has rescued me from being stranded in my own muck.

The physical hands and feet of Jesus are no longer present. But sincere ministries continue to bear witness to the living presence of Jesus. And although he may not show up to eat our broiled fish, his presence is real in meal ministries such as Luke House and the Sun Prairie Food Pantry, around the dinner tables at LOGOS and the luncheon tables at XYZ, during fellowship hour on Sunday mornings, at our own kitchen tables and at this very communion table when we celebrate his holy meal.

Jesus is not only the center of his friends' amazement and disbelief; he is also the focus of their instruction. Like a patient teacher, he explains yet again the lessons he had taught them earlier, the meaning of which they obviously had not grasped at the time. And he explains to them that they are the witnesses. They have the responsibility of witnessing, sharing, teaching others ... and they best grasp onto the understanding that the Risen Christ lives in each one of them.

The most convincing proof of the resurrection is the daily testimony of the faithful that Christ still lives and his ministry continues.

Last night as I was getting Henry ready for bed, he was having a hard time settling down. He was awfully excited about today. He's excited because his cousin Lily is going to be baptized. I asked him why all the excitement and he said, "When Lily's baptized, she'll be a real person." I gave him a puzzled look and told him that Lily is a real person. I love it when 6 yr olds think they have something over you. His expression of frustration over my lack of understanding theology was priceless. Henry looked at me and said, "No, mom, when Lily's baptized she'll be a real person **of God.**"

Ohhhh ... Don't ever discredit children's understanding of the presence of God. Most of the time, it's very real and very accurate.

The hope and the joy of Easter is that we are ALL the real people of God. The world is in great need of our witnessing, our sharing and our understanding that the ministry of the Risen Christ needs to continue. Are you ready to do that? Or are you still doubting? Are you still afraid?

Well, it's your job ... Even in those times of fear and doubt, please know that the risen Christ lives in you.

I live inside the resurrection story because I just don't think I'm strong enough or tough enough to live with the alternative. You're invited to live inside the resurrection story too. May it be so. Amen.

You got anything to eat?