

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

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Luke 24:36-48

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

Prayer & Sermon

God of love and new life,

Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.

These weeks of the Easter Season can feel a bit like Groundhog day. We keep talking about the same day with small variations. I can tell you that this is the last week we will focus so closing on that first Resurrection day. Today's variation of the first

Easter Sunday comes from Luke 24. This is one of the only times in the year that the Lectionary gives us the same story from the various gospels week after week. It can be a bit confusing to hear the same basic plot with such different details, one tells us of Thomas, one barely gives us any sight of the resurrected Jesus, and today's story comes to us just after the Walk to Emmaus appearance to a few Disciples and centers around Jesus asking for some chow. Though there are some big differences, these stories also have plenty that is the same. One of the similarities that has been sticking out to me as we journey through Easter together this year, is how all of these stories make it clear how shocking, confusing, and even frightening the events were for those experiencing it. The resurrection was not straightforward but an impactful experience that really shook up the Disciples and the world. Perhaps that is why the same part of the story is repeated in the Lectionary three weeks in a row, it is a reminder to us to not let the resurrection story, let Easter, to just be a little blip on our yearly radar but to draw us closer to the story, and to give it the best chance to shake us up too.

What does the Luke version of the story have to speak to us today, especially with it being Native American Ministries Sunday. Like the other accounts, in Luke, we know that by that first Sunday night, all of the Disciples should have at least heard of the resurrection of Jesus. In Luke, Jesus showed up on the Road to Emmaus to two of his Disciples. He hid his identity from them to begin with, but in the moment he took the bread, blessed it, and broke it, their eyes were opened, they realized who it was, and Jesus vanished. They ran back to Jerusalem and told their friends, the rest of the Disciples, of what they experienced. Similar to other accounts, those hearing the tale, and even those who experienced themselves, are unsure of it and don't fully believe that Jesus is truly and fully resurrected. They questioned how much they could have faith in this crazy new reality. Our scripture today starts with "While they were talking about this..." I have brought this up with the other accounts as well, but it is important for us that are so detached from the original event and are so familiar with the resurrection to remember what the Disciples would have been feeling, fairly so, as they gathered in that upper room. The Disciples are in a place of fear and anxiety as they wait, gathered. With the crucifixion, the world got a lot more scary and lonely for the Disciples who had gathered with Jesus in Jerusalem. Their leader was just publicly executed as public enemy #1. They fear that as Jesus was hated and persecuted, they would be too if they went out in public. Many of them had left behind their jobs, families, and lives, to follow and learn from Jesus. With Jesus being killed they likely would have had strong concerns that Jesus turned out to not be the Messiah and that they put everything in their life at risk for nothing. Even as they have now heard from the two Disciples, they have a hard time believing it, and don't know what it would mean if it's true, and so perhaps this news hasn't helped but only increased their anxiety.

What do our bodies feel like when we wait around anxiously? When you are nervous but can't do anything about it? Do you clench your jaw? Get irritable? Get quiet? Tap your toes? Become restless and have to move around? When I am really nervous, everything tenses, but the most noticeable is my hands that clench into the smallest, tightest ball I can. It's like if I can channel all my nervous energy into holding my hands tight, then it won't feel so bad in the rest of me. I imagine the Disciples were doing the same, either literally, physically clenching their fists, or figuratively as they hold tight to the little faith they have left, perhaps holding tight to the little bit of hope that

what those two Disciples said was true. It is in that anxiety that they had been stuck stewing in for the three days, and now even more in the last day after they started hearing rumors of the empty tomb. It is in that heightened anxiety that Jesus comes to them with presence and voice. Jesus doesn't knock, both not wasting time and perhaps to keep them from worrying more with an unexpected visitor at the door. Jesus just appears among them all, declaring, "Peace be with you." Jesus sees their terror and surprise and knows they think he could just be a ghost. Jesus, knowing he had told them plenty beforehand that this all would happen, reminds them that they didn't need to be frightened or doubt his resurrection. But is clearly not too upset with them as he immediately offers them proof by his wounds. In response to their closed hands of anxiety, he stretches out his arms with hands open, showing them the marks of his human vulnerability and the bodily proof that he has overcome it. He is no ghost, but is there with them in the flesh. Jesus is saying, "See? You can believe it. It's true. I am here." It does the trick, relief and rejoicing shine through.

Well, Jesus didn't let them linger in that joy and relief, now that he had settled the truth of the Resurrection, it was time to eat! It's where us Methodists get our love of potlucks from! This is one of those moments that Jesus sounds so much like a teenage boy, even though he was likely in his 30s, the business is done, so, "Alrighty then, now that that's all settled, ya got anything to eat?" Though it is funny to think that Jesus was just hungry and ready to move on from the drama, Jesus asking to eat with them has a bit more significance. You see, in the book of Luke, eating together was Jesus's thing. He spent a lot of his ministry eating with his Disciples, sharing meals with sinners and outcasts and the downtrodden, he broke bread and fed the thousands. And even just in the hours before he met the whole group in the upper room, when he walked and talked with the two Disciples he broke bread with them too. Asking to eat with them is his response to their fear, joy, happiness, and questioning. It is another way for Jesus to say, "See? It is me. I am here, in the flesh!" This request brings the group back to one of the pillars of Jesus' ministry, radical hospitality. It is also a way to ground them in the midst of so many high emotions. "Let's eat." Let's do this normal thing we have done a hundred times. Let's get back to fellowship and relationship with each other. Let's be reminded of the times I have shared bread and fish with you a hundred times before. One of my research sources posed this good question, what truly convinced them it was Jesus? His hands and feet or this classic Jesus invitation to eat together?

Now that he has convinced them the rumors are true and he re-established relationship with them through table fellowship, now it is time to look ahead. Building a foundation, Jesus reminds them "that everything written about [him] in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Now, he gives them what they need to be the ones to take on the baton of ministry. Verse 45 says, "Then he opened their minds to understand the scripture," which was to bring them to understand the fullness of why Jesus has come. Perhaps in opening their minds, they also begin to open their hands, releasing fear, anger, and their sense of scarcity. Not allowing their disbelief to have the last word, Jesus shares with him that he is still sending them out into the world, just as God sent him. This full understanding of the scriptures and Jesus's purpose, empowers them to go forth and share the good news. With all of that, he equips them to go out to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. Jesus is equipping them with the tools to be the church, which is what leads to us being

the church today. Just as Jesus opened the Disciples' hands clenched in fear and doubt, the work of the church has continued being a ministry of unclenching our hands from around fear and control and self-centeredness. It is now us who share with open hands, with our neighbors, our families, the ministries inside the church, and greater United Methodist ministries like those in the Native American community. It is our open hands that puts repentance and forgiveness of sins into action. It is our open hands that work together to provide comfort, healing, support, and reconciliation.

On this Native American Ministries Sunday, we have an opportunity to strengthen the ministry of the church, of the ministry of the Michigan conference and of the United Methodist church as a whole. Our gifts join together with the others from around the country and world to extend our open hands and open others' hands, sharing peace, justice, and hope into Native American communities. We can know that of what we contribute today, half will stay in our conference and support Michigan Native American Ministries and the other half will go to supporting the work of national Native American United Methodist ministries. It is as Easter people, people living out the hope of new life and creation, people living out with the promise that Christ meets us with peace in our anxious moments, people living out Jesus's proclamation of repentance met with forgiveness, that we unfurl our hands from around fear and doubt that try to control us and we open our hands to accept Christ's presence and take on the work of Christ in the world.

We can see and celebrate the work of Easter people with open hands that is already happening around us. Easter is evident in the Pa Wa Ting ministry in Grand Rapids, the name means, Gathering of Elders. The ministry is a meals program, typically served twice a week. It brings different tribes or nations together for food and fellowship, building community, as well as contacts for medical services and other issues. Part of today's special offering from around the state goes to this ministry. Easter is evident in the "Spirit Journey" ministry based at Northport Indian Mission church, North of Traverse City, that is focused on empowering "Native American youth to reach their potential by offering after school programming, trips, summer camp, and more. I got to hear a presentation on this mission during an Annual Conference, their work is so important with this group of marginalized youth. Outside of Michigan, Easter is evident in the revival of the Maskoke language through an ecovillage that practices intimate relationship with the natural world. Easter is evident in the Native American United Methodists who are responding to God's call to ministry and the scholarships that equip them with theological education. Easter is a time to feel the peace of Christ. Jesus has given us the power of open hands.

Just as Jesus showed up to all kinds of people, just as he joined together with them in normal day-to-day things like eating simple meals, just as he healed and taught and forgave sins across the land, we are now called to that work. We are called to be part of our community, to touch lives, to assist God in changing lives and bringing life to people who are feeling broken. Just as Jesus appeared in an upper room among his followers, opening their minds, and in doing so, giving them hope and peace, Jesus continues to show up in each of us, giving us the same and helping us bring it to others. Today on Native American Ministries Sunday we are taking part in a global moment of opening our minds and opening our hands, extending hope and peace through The United Methodist Church. As we celebrate this work already being done and celebrate

getting to take part of it ourselves, we are part of continuing the joy and relief of the of Easter. We get to continue proclaiming, the Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Let us pray together from these words written by Rev. Jeff Ramsland, pastor of the Cherokee United Methodist Church in Cherokee, NC.

Let us worship the Creator with hearts open to all peoples,
where pride and prejudice once dwelt;

Let us worship Creator with minds open to the wisdom of Native peoples,
where listening and respect once had no place.

Let us honor the One who freely gives by showing honor
to those who were once and still remain oppressed.

Let us worship the God of diversity,
who made the world in colors, in seasons, in endless variety;
who created the diversity of the earth's peoples in His image.

We were created to honor one another
and in so doing we honor the Creator.
Let us honor Him today by reflecting in our worship
and in life His image -- love.

I will close our prayer with a traditional Native American Prayer that can be found in our Hymnal, (No. 329)

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us your peace.

Amen.