

Message for April 23, 2023 Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church Earth Day

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“Relentless Resurrection” Rev. Trish Eckert

Bible Wisdom Teachings

- Luke 24:13-35

As we move through Eastertide, we hear the stories following the crucifixion of Jesus, as he appears in unexpected ways. Today’s text is Luke’s account of Jesus’ resurrection. The gospels give us multiple narratives of Jesus appearing to a number of different people over a forty-day period. On Easter Sunday, we heard in the Gospel of John that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. Matthew recounts the story of an angel speaking to the women who went to the tomb, and as they left to tell the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead, Jesus met up with them and the women “took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.” (Matt 28:9) Interestingly, in the reading this morning, we actually hear not only about the appearance of Jesus to the two on the road to Emmaus, but Luke also tucks in a sentence that tells us Simon also saw the risen Christ. As the eyes of the two travelers are opened and they realize who just broke bread with them, they hurry back to the others in Jerusalem, and when they arrive, they are told, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” There is no further elaboration on this, yet this line is another sighting among Jesus’ followers who witness what Jesus had promised – that he would rise again. The disciples come to know that he has risen because they see him with their own eyes, and they begin to share this good news with others.

This morning’s story is typically called The Walk to Emmaus, though the part that especially grabs my attention involves what happens after Jesus and his traveling companions come to the end of their walk. Luke tells us that Jesus, unrecognized by Cleopas and his companion as they walked together, accepts their invitation to stay the night with them. They gather at the table, the ultimate place of hospitality. In that gesture that was so familiar in his life, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and broke it. Luke tells us that it was in this moment that “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him”; in Jesus’ actions of breaking and blessing, they knew him.

Given the confusion around Jesus’ death and rumored resurrection, this is some serious comfort food. Yet this is more than a solacing dinner. The meal at Emmaus reveals the resurrected presence of Christ, who, as before his death, still loves to sit down with folks at a table. In a brilliant moment of illumination, his dining companions see, and understand. The knowledge he had tried to impart to them as they walked along the road now becomes flesh: what they had tried to grasp with their intellect as Jesus broke open the scriptures, they now experience in and with their bodies as Jesus breaks the bread.

Jesus had been so fond of feasting when he was alive that he earned a reputation of being “drunkard and a glutton, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Even after his

death and resurrection, he does not seem interested in refuting his depiction as a guy who likes his groceries; in fact, he seems to relish it. The table at Emmaus is not his only post-resurrection meal. John tells a marvelous story of the risen Jesus feeding several of the disciples a seaside breakfast of fish and bread. (John 21.1-14)

As I mentioned when we first gathered this morning, in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, the relationship between humans, the land, and our food is explored in the way a simple meal can reveal to us resurrection hope in the midst of death.

We seek this resurrection hope in so many areas of our lives and in our world. Rebirth is appearing all around us as the trees begin to bud and we hear the early morning chatter of birds. We see and hear all around us the earth is waking up from months of hibernation. Over 50 years ago, we celebrated our first Earth Day, what has become a worldwide event that occurs annually on April, 22. It celebrates the environmental diversity of Earth and highlights ways of protecting our planet. Earth Day grew out of a movement, when there was no Environmental Protection Agency, before there was a Clean Air Act and a Clean Water Act. It actually was started by a Wisconsin Senator – Gaylor Nelson, who was an environmentalist. He borrowed from the idea of anti-Vietnam War “teach-ins,” or discussions, on campuses across the country, and adopted the same type of grassroots approach to protecting the environment. It was Nelson who first announced the concept of an Earth Day in the fall of 1969, and following massive public support, the first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970. When we hear terms like "code red for humanity" and "climate change", it can feel difficult to focus on the small actions individuals and communities can take to address the climate crisis. But Earth Day strives to highlight how everyone can be part of the change.

When we imagine the future for coming generations, we are buffeted between despair and hope. I notice that I kind of move through cycles of feeling overwhelmed and then realizing that there is still a great deal that we are doing and can further develop that will ensure the health of our planet. My son, who graduated last year with a degree in Environmental Sustainability has pointed out to me that his generation doesn't have the “luxury” of despair – they can't give up because they need a place to live!

This year's meditation theme for the Center of Action and Contemplation is *The Prophetic Path*. Richard Rohr reminds us that the Christian way is a prophetic path, describing The Prophetic Path as a journey of two steps forward and one back - that falling, failing, suffering becomes the energy for the next two steps forward. He says, “If you allow reality to show itself to you in the daily news, in your own heart, you'll see that it almost always deserves sadness, disappointment, what the Bible calls lamentation, that things are not as they could be. Things are not as they should be.” He tells us to avoid thinking of this in a sentimental or judgmental way, where we label what is good and bad, but rather recognize it as a lesson that “leads you towards solidarity with the suffering of the world.” He notes, “Today many of us are joining that suffering through the lens of Ukraine or many of the drought ridden countries of the world. We can't ignore that. We can't say this is not happening. But what it leads us to

is not judgment or thinking we can eliminate it, not that we shouldn't do our bit to help, but we enter into solidarity with it. And that indicates the character of the life of prayer, a life of solidarity with universal suffering.”

So, within that theme, ecologist and pastor Andi Lloyd is featured this week in the Center for Action and Contemplation blog. Andi encourages us to make space for grief and mourning, which is especially valuable when we're striving to address the complex concerns that are unfolding regarding climate change. Yes, it is important to remain hopeful, faithful, creative, and energetic – but it is through suffering that we are galvanized to make changes to what appear to be intractable problems.

Lloyd describes our interconnectedness with God, each other, and the earth on which we dwell, acknowledging the distress of our physical planet:

Our lives are held, connected, one to the other and all to God: we are bound up in a beautiful, multicolored, homespun fabric. That fabric is an ecological truth: it describes the deeply interconnected and interdependent world that I came to know as an ecologist. And that fabric is a theological truth, reflecting the world as God made it to be—a relational world, a connected world, an interdependent world.

The land's mourning speaks simultaneously of a vision of the world as it ought to be—that beautiful fabric—and the truth of the world as it is: too much injustice and too little love fraying the threads that hold us all. The land feels those fraying threads. The land grieves those fraying threads. The land mourns.

Now, as then, the fabric that connects all of creation is badly torn: torn by manifold injustices wrought and perpetuated by the exploitative systems in which we live, torn by ideologies of scarcity that teach us to love too narrowly and too little. To mourn is to speak that truth to the lies that prop up the denial on which the status quo depends.....

Mourning together, in true solidarity, we name the truth of what's wrong. And in so doing, we begin to make it right.

In some ways, I think the mourning of the disciples, their shared grief, broke them open to the truth of the resurrection. When we hear the stories of Jesus' followers and witness their confusion, their amazement and joy, their impulse to go and share the good news, we are reminded of the gifts available to us when we remain present to the range of emotions that we experience. We are better equipped to grapple with the mysteries before us when we do so.

When we think about what Jesus was doing among his followers, he sought ways to teach and equip them so that they could carry his message of love forward. It was important to Jesus that his followers engage the mystery that happens in a meal, that they know the table as a place where we recognize that we cannot rely solely on ourselves to summon

the sustenance that we need. A shared table is a sacred space where we acknowledge, in the presence of others, that we are hungry: not only for the feeding of our bodies but also of our souls.

The table at Emmaus reminds us that there is a profound connection between eating and knowing. This knowing that we experience at the table comes both as a deep comfort and also a keen challenge. As Cleopas and his companion discovered on that evening in Emmaus, the presence of Christ persists when his followers gather to eat. Particularly in times of confusion and grief, his presence at the table comes as comfort and solace indeed. The knowing that happens in the breaking of bread, however, requires something of us. This kind of knowing calls us to move beyond relying solely on our intellect and to open our eyes and our entire being to the ways in which Christ reveals himself in those with whom we eat.

In these days of resurrection, what are you hungry for? What kind of table hospitality are you giving or receiving? How is the table a place of comfort? Of challenge? Of knowing?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- As we travel with Christ in this season of resurrection, how will we approach our tables, our meals, and one another in a way that will open our eyes and help us to see and to know the Christ who lingers with us?
- How might we care for creation in ways that align with the inclusive and equitable approach that Jesus models for us?
- What are you beginning to see and know that reveals abundance, creativity, and possibility?