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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday of Easter/Year B
April 15, 2018
Text: Luke 24:36b-48

“Witness”

You are witnesses of these things.” In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Easter story continues today with the Gospel of Luke who wrote that it was that evening of the first day of the week and the disciples were still trying to wrap their heads around what had allegedly happened earlier in the day-how the women had gone to where the body of Jesus had been taken and found the tomb empty. “Two figures in dazzling clothes” had spoken to them reminding them of Jesus’ predictions regarding his death and resurrection. They ran back to tell the other disciples only to be dismissed-their story “an idle tale.” Then Cleopas and his companion told their story of how a stranger had joined them as they walked toward the village of Emmaus and that they had invited him to eat with them. It was only when he sat at table with them and broke the bread that suddenly their eyes were opened and they recognized that it was Jesus. And that when they saw that it was him, he disappeared. They were just about to say more when Jesus suddenly stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were so taken back, so startled that they all thought they were seeing a ghost. Though they heard the stories, they had a hard time believing who it was.

But yes, it was Jesus who was standing there among them. We can only imagine that they were positively petrified. Wouldn’t we have been? “Look at my hands. Look at my feet,” he said as he tried to convince them that he was no phantom. Not a ghost. Not an apparition but he himself. Their Teacher. Their Master. Their Friend. They saw him. They saw him eat broiled fish for goodness sake! And still the word “disbelieving” is used of them. 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.*” Then Luke writes, that he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Jesus had taught them these things already. He told them more than once even before he set his eyes on Jerusalem. But here they were, still terrified and startled, doubting and disbelieving when he came to visit them that evening. So

Jesus taught them again. *“Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”*

“You are witnesses of these things.”

Their minds raced. What had they witnessed in all their time spent together? What had they heard? What had they seen?

They were there during his early days of teaching in the synagogues. They saw him heal the man with uncleaned spirits, another with the withered hand and still another who was full of leprosy.

They were there as he spoke of blessings that belonged to the least likely—the poor, the hungry, and those who wept.

They were there when a centurion sought him out, asking him to heal his critically ill servant. Don’t come to my home but speak a word. And Jesus did. The servant was healed.

They were there when he told the parables of the Good Samaritan and of the rich man and Lazarus, and the persistent widow. When he taught them about compassion, forgiveness, when he welcomed women to join him in his mission. When he fed thousands. He had taught them how to pray. They saw him take little children into his arms.

They were there when he told them once, twice, three times according to Luke’s Gospel, that the Son of Man would suffer, die, and be raised on the third day. “Pay attention”, he told them. But their minds were not open.

They had been there when he rode into Jerusalem, eaten with him at the final meal, walked with him in the Garden. At his arrest many of them could not go any further seeing that what he spoke of was coming true. But at least some of the women stayed. They stayed and returned on the third day and found an empty tomb. Peter saw him. Cleopas and his companion walked with him. And now he was with them. In the flesh. *“You are witnesses of these things.”*

What were they to proclaim? His words, his deeds, his suffering, death, and resurrection. ALL OF IT and most especially that repentance for the forgiveness

of sins was to be proclaimed in his Name, not just to some but to ALL nations starting there in Jerusalem. Our first lesson from the Book of Acts recounts how Peter did just as Jesus commanded, “*Repent therefore*”, he said to the crowds, “*and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.*”

Peter, James, John, Mary, and all those who were the earliest followers of the Way gave witness with their lives as they proclaimed these truths about the risen Jesus. They gave witness to all of it and shared Jesus’ message of repentance and forgiveness. We have heard the Jesus story and their stories and the stories of what happened long after they were gone. And even now the Easter story continues as you and I and Christians of all walks of life, of every culture, and race, and denomination, and nations are charged to bear witness to these truths with *our* lives. We are to witness to what *we* have seen and to what *we* have heard, to what we ourselves experience as the risen Lord continues to come in our day.

We are to witness because Jesus has been with us as well-through all the events and blessings of our lives, in those times when we thought we couldn’t do any more than put one foot in front of the other, during those times we have hungered, been in pain and wept as if there were no tomorrow. He stands with us in all of our victories and disappointments. He is with us through every diagnosis and in every discerning moment. He is present in pews and in homes, in prison cells and hospitals, and board rooms. He stands on street corners and walks along dusty roads. He is present in this world.

How different the world would be if others saw the hands and feet of Jesus transposed in and through us and all those who believe. How different the world would be if we truly lived as “the children of God” committed to transforming the world to reflect the world God intended, the world Jesus showed us has the potential to be. A world that is in need of witnesses in his Name. Witnesses to those feel as though they are invisible. To those who continue to be poor, hungry, blind, and lame. To those who continue to weep and mourn and search for justice. Those living with HIV/AIDS and other illnesses. Those being swallowed up by alcohol and drug abuse. Witnesses to those sexually assaulted and bullied. To those who feel unloved. Those who are continually put down and beat down because of who they love, their race, skin color, gender, ethnicity, age.

How different the world could be if we lived as if our sins, my sins, your sins, the world’s sins can be and will be and shall be forgiven. Forgiven as were the sins of the paralytic man brought to Jesus on his stretcher, as was the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair. Forgiven

as were those who nailed him to the cross. Forgiven as those who abandoned him and denied him.

How different would our city be, the world be if we owned up to our mistakes instead of passing on blame. If we began openly repenting of our messes, our screw ups, our shortcomings? If we repented of our ignorance? Our privilege? If we repented of turning blind eyes to the plight of others? Of failing to hear their cries?

What would happen if we actually lived our lives ready to forgive? To forgive others as we have been forgiven?

Jesus says to us today what he said to his followers Easter evening so long ago: *“You are witnesses to these things.”*

What are *we* to proclaim? His words, his deeds, his suffering, death, and resurrection, repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and the blessings and gifts given to us in his Name. His very presence. That the time is now to be the world Jesus showed us has the potential to be. Proclaim it! Speak it! Live it! Witness!

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!