

Embracing Belief

Luke 24:36-43

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First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Last week we heard a favorite post-resurrection story. Today we hear one that for many is problematic. Among all the stories of encounters with the risen Jesus this is the one that has a greater focus on the physicality of resurrection.

And so, for many modern people, this story offers more questions than answers. After all, we are a people who, in many parts of our lives, have been trained to believe in that which we can prove and test and prove again. We are a people who have been raised in a scientific era where we have come to equate truth and fact, too often losing our appreciation for Truth when it shows up in the shape of something we can't measure and test.

And so, a story like this where Jesus appears, seemingly without using a door, and is first perceived to be a ghost, but then invites the disciples to engage him physically saying, "Look at my hands and my feet...", "touch me and see...", and finally asking them to bring him food so they can watch him eat it - a story like this presents some challenges to the minds of people who don't typically believe that dead bodies can come back to life and sit down at the dinner table to enjoy a meal.

So, what do we do with this story? What do we, who are often more comfortable with the idea of spiritual resurrection, do with a Jesus who, after having been killed in a very public scene, shows up and asks to be fed?

Perhaps, as I believe is true about many places in our lives, this isn't an either/or proposition, but instead an experience of both/and.

As someone said recently in Bible study when we were looking at this text, maybe it is okay to embrace both science, *and* a faith in that which is mystical, which is beyond explanation.

Maybe it's important to remember that this story, and others in scripture, weren't recorded as science, but are stories of faith and belief, they are stories that transcend science.

Maybe it's important to remember that we can embrace both, that they don't have to be in conflict, but can harmonize.

And maybe it's important to remember that there is a difference between lower case t truth - that which is provable fact - and capital T Truth - that which is about meaning and essence. Maybe it's important to remember that we can embrace both, and that there is a time and place for each.

The other thing that this means is that we can be communities of both/and. The reality is that in every congregation I have served there have been people who have embraced the idea of bodily resurrection without question, even held it central to their faith. And down the pew from them there have been those who loved Jesus and followed him faithfully even as they couldn't believe that he had actually returned as a physical being. And the both/and allows us to create space for all of these people to live out their faith loving God and serving their neighbors together.

And maybe, if we remember the text, there is room for faith and disbelief to live together inside of us. After all, the portion of the scripture Jen read for us this morning says, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering..." (Luke 24:41a). And it is after that Jesus eats some fish, talks to them about the scriptures as he did with those on the road to Emmaus, commissions them as witnesses to his story, and then leads them out to Bethany where he ascends and leaves them to carry on with his work.

Never in this chapter does Luke tell us that they were convinced or that anything was proven or that they finally and fully believed that he was more than a ghost.

So, what difference does the bodily resurrection make? Perhaps, more than being only about Jesus, it reminds us that this life, these bodies, the time and places in which we live, the people with whom we share our lives - all these things matter. The love of God was made known to us most clearly in the real, physical, human life of Jesus. And we continue to make that love known in our real, physical, human lives.

In the movie *Secondhand Lions*, adolescent Walter is left to live with his two eccentric great uncles. Uncle Hub tells stories of amazing things, so amazing that Walter can't help but wonder if they are really true. Finally he asks. And Hub replies that it doesn't matter. He says, "If you want to believe something, believe it. Just because something isn't true doesn't mean you can't believe it...Sometimes the things that may or may not be true are the things a man needs to believe in the most - that people are basically good; that honor, courage and virtue mean everything; that power and money, money and power mean nothing; that good always triumphs over evil. I want you to remember this - love, true love never dies. Remember that." And Uncle Hub ends saying, "Doesn't matter if they're true or not you see - a man should believe in those things because those are the things worth believing in."

Friends, faith is about more than provable fact. Faith is about believing in that which is worth believing in. Faith is about believing in that which makes the world better not only for you and for me, but for all of God's creation.

When we embrace the Truth of the resurrection story, we claim again and again that we believe that God loves us too much to leave us alone...that God's intention is for life and for good...that death and hate don't get the last word.

And when we follow Jesus, then we live into these beliefs and we make them true for others.
Amen.

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