

April 14, 2024

Luke 24:36-48

Sermon Title: Suspiciously Joyful

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 Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and 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.

Please pray with me: God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

In a museum outside Pawhuska, Oklahoma, a small plaque commemorates the story of the ghost of Pawhuska. Intrigued, I paused to read the story. John Stink moved to Pawhuska in the early 1890's where he preferred to camp in the open air rather than living in a white man's house. His Osage name was Ho-Tah-Moie which means rolling thunder. It is believed that John Stink fell ill during a tuberculosis epidemic. One day some friends dropped by his campsite and found him unresponsive and his body cold and stiff. Thinking he was dead they buried him in an Osage cemetery with some artifacts, placing him in a shallow grave covered with rocks, except for his face, which they left exposed so he could find his way to the spirit world.

Eventually, he emerged from his death-like coma and exhumed himself. He walked back toward his campsite, and he asked the first person he encountered for a pinch of tobacco. Terrified, the individual ran away. A once popular and well-liked man, Stink's

friends now ran away from him in fear. The only way they could make sense of his re-appearance was to believe him to be a ghost.¹

In our reading for today, we have Jesus' disciples trying to process reports that Jesus is alive. Cleopas and his companion are there. They encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus, first he appeared to them as a stranger walking on the same road. This stranger listened as the despondent Cleopas and his companion shared the news of the empty tomb. Then this stranger shared with them about scripture in a way that captivated them. When they asked this stranger to stay in their home and eat, the stranger joined them at their table, and just like at the last supper, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and broke it. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized that the stranger in their midst was Jesus, then, POOF! He was gone. Immediately, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples.

Imagine trying to make sense of this news. Jesus walked with them. He was physically there with them. But then he just disappeared when they recognized him. This is what the disciples are discussing when Jesus reappears in front of them.

They don't know how to make sense of what they are seeing and experiencing. They are startled and terrified, thinking Jesus is a ghost. Jesus convinces them that he is not a ghost by inviting them to touch him and to see his hands and feet. He even eats in front of them.

The disciples react with a mixed bag of emotions, wanting to believe, wanting to lean into their joy, yet struggling to release their doubts. Would we be any different? Are we any different? How do we make sense of Jesus, raised from the dead, in the flesh, asking for food? I love how Luke says it, "*Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering...*"

Their disbelief leaves the door open for wonder and curiosity. Unlike John Stink's friends who had one explanation for his appearance, the disciples left room for something they couldn't explain. Disbelieving is another way of saying, "I don't know." And "I don't know," leaves room for wonder and questioning and growth.

Disbelief and wonder opens our minds. Disbelief and wonder opens our eyes. Disbelief and wonder opens our hearts. Disbelief and wonder is the perfect posture for what happens next. Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures. He gives them an

¹ David Farris, Edmond Life and Leisure, September 26, 2019

interpretive framework by helping them to see the bigger story of God's love for this world: a story that bends toward justice and shalom. Jesus helps them connect the dots.

Jesus appearing after his resurrection is the necessary conclusion of one chapter of this bigger story. The resurrected Jesus assures us that the cross does not get the last word. The resurrected Jesus assures us that the story will continue in the likes of joy-filled and disbelieving disciples willing to wonder what God is up to now.

This bigger story continues with the disciples – with Pentecost – with Paul – as they strive to become the gospel they proclaim, transforming lives, creating communities of compassion, love and service – working for God's justice and shalom. And when they get discouraged, they remember Jesus standing among them. Jesus lives to show us that God is not finished! Love is alive! Peace is alive! Hope is alive! Joy is alive! The story continues with us.

God opens tombs of darkness and despair. God opens eyes to recognize God with us. God opens minds so that we can find our place in this bigger story. The challenge for us is to stay open – open to our neighbor – open to love – open to forgiveness – open to new ways of seeing and understanding – open to awe and mystery.

A couple weeks ago my Texas friend Deb was grumbling all the people invading Dallas to view the eclipse. She didn't quite understand all the hoopla about the experience of totality – until she experienced it. After the eclipse she texted, "Now I get it."

<put up picture>

I watched it on TV here at church as the news outlets reported from city to city in the path of totality. The same scene repeated, a reverent hush, dropped jaws, a collective sense of vastness. Joy and disbelief. Open.

Dean Thomas took this photo in Ohio.....

I want to conclude with this prayer by Andrew King.

*As the pine cone opens
to the warm breath of spring
as the buds of the tree
open to the sun
as the thirsty earth
opens to life-giving rain*

*as the mouth of the babe
opens for milk
as the heart of the lover
opens to its love
so open our minds
Creator eternal
so open our minds
O Lover of all
so open our minds
O crucified Redeemer
to the presence of your grace
in the sacred word,
and the grace that is your presence,
O living Word.*

— Andrew King