

**Sermon**

**“The Story Is Never Over”**

April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 ~ First Presbyterian Church

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Based on Luke 24:36-48

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Luke 24:36-48**

<sup>36</sup> While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” <sup>37</sup> They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> 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.” <sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup> While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate in their presence. <sup>44</sup> 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.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> 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, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.” [NRSV]

**OPENING PRAYER:** Our Lord and our God, through the hearing and proclaiming of your Word, fill us with your Spirit. Soften our hearts that we may delight in your presence. Sharpen our minds that we may discern your truth. And, shape our wills that we may desire your ways. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord we pray, and let all God’s people say ... Amen.

**Jesus Was the Talk of the Town**

We have to remember that Jesus was the talk of the town. People all over Jerusalem were talking about how he entered the holy city so triumphantly on Palm Sunday. People were talking about his “temple-tantrum” outburst the following day. And, that week long ago, people were talking about the Passover—an event that Jesus observed with his inner circle of friends and followers in a

private upper room. Then people were talking about Jesus being arrested and put on trial. And, people were certainly talking about him being tortured and then crucified.

And, you can bet his closest friends and family members were talking, too. They were asking themselves questions and wondering what it all meant? What actually *had* happened? What were they to make of the disaster of that “Good” Friday? And, were they next—was this the end for them as well? Maybe so.

Or, maybe it wasn’t that kind of end at all. Maybe they just needed a reset—some time and space to settle themselves down a bit, to gather up their things, and to head on back to where they had all come from—to fishing or tax collecting or whatever it was from days gone by. But, just when they thought it was the end and that the story was over, God still had something to say and do.

Because that’s how it is with God. Just when we think it’s all over, God reminds us that there’s always something more. And, so when it comes to this Easter thing, God reminds us that it’s all about God and no one else—it had always been about God; it was still about God; and it continues to be about God forever.

### **Resurrection Happened**

And, so the ugliness of the crucifixion gave way to the power of the resurrection, and the power of the resurrection changed everything—it changed people, it changed faith, it changed hope—everything was turned upside down and nothing was left the same. And, as such, God’s story goes on.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, this sounds an awfully lot like an Easter sermon ... well it does, and it should ... because while for us Easter Sunday was *already a week ago*, our scripture passage from Luke’s gospel keeps us on that very same first Easter day. The remaining disciples had gathered together in secret, hiding from the authorities. And, they were probably doing their very best to sort fact from fiction. Scripture tells us that various women had visited the empty tomb and had returned to tell their story, but no one believed them. And, we are told that Peter went to the empty tomb to see for himself, and he indeed verified the women’s story. Scripture also tells us that on that very same day,

Jesus appears to two of his followers on the road to a village called Emmaus—an experience so impactful that they rushed back the seven miles to Jerusalem, in the dark, to tell the remaining disciples about it.

### **Jesus Appears to Them**

So you can imagine that their heads must have almost been spinning off their necks! For so many reasons, they were immersed in chaos and confusion. And, now they were asking themselves a different set of questions ... like, what really had happened to Jesus' body? Who can be believed? Whose testimony is credible—the women, Peter, the two from Emmaus—were these simply the imaginations of grieving friends or were they real? Then, right in the midst of their escalating alarm, out of nowhere, Jesus showed up! Now, Jesus is standing before them and they all encounter the risen Christ—and it changed them, it changed their faith, it changed their hope, it changed their actions. And, as such, God's story goes on.

### **The Real Jesus**

Initially, they were startled and terrified, and they thought they were seeing a ghost. But, this was no ghost. It was not a fantasy or a hallucination or a figment of their imagination—it was the real Jesus. The same risen Christ standing in the room with them was the same Jesus from the upper room the Thursday night prior, and it was the same Jesus who had died that following Friday afternoon. And, he proved it to them three times over—to ease their doubts and their fears, he said to them, “Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.” And, then he also said, “Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And, then to erase any lingering disbelief, he asked them for some dinner, “Have you anything here to eat?” and they gave him a piece of fish, which he promptly ate right in front of them. Indeed, it was the real Jesus, and it was the same Jesus they had always known and loved. It must have been such a familiar presence to them.

And, this same Jesus did what Jesus had always done before—he was a teacher after all, and so he taught them another lesson. No, he didn't explain how the resurrection worked, and he didn't provide an itinerary of where he had been

since late afternoon the previous Friday. Instead he opened their hearts and minds to the scriptures—telling them God’s story and explaining once and for all how his whole life, death, and rising were about what God was doing in the world; how the scriptures from the laws of Moses to the prophets and to the psalms had all been about God, and God’s will and purpose—that it had always been about God; it was still about God; and it continues to be about God forever. And, Jesus told them that they had been witnesses to what God had accomplished, and he commissioned them to “go” and “tell” the story—to tell God’s story joyfully and courageously; to tell God’s story boldly and without fear, just as I talked about in my sermon last week on Easter Sunday morning. And, as such, God’s story goes on.

### **God’s Story is the Church’s Story**

Because they did go and tell God’s story, and ever since that first Easter, God’s story has been linked with the church’s story ... with our story—a story that teaches us that the church—made up of startled, puzzled, sometimes doubting and disbelieving children of God—was not left to live forever in an upper room or at the foot of a cross or even hiding away in secret in some unknown part of Jerusalem. Instead, it lived through the highs and lows of Good Friday and Easter and the days that followed, and was sent out into the world by our risen Lord!

And, speaking of the church, during my recent Easter reading I once again came across a wonderful quote from Episcopal priest and author, Barbara Brown Taylor, and she has this interesting tidbit to say, “Christ’s church may have been born in a graveyard, but that baby grew quickly, beyond anyone’s imagination.”<sup>1</sup> The church *did* grow quickly—rapidly—beyond imagining because people of faith continued to tell God’s story and how it changed everything. And, as a result, Jesus is still the talk of the town.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, David L. and Taylor, Barbara Brown, eds. Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2. WJKP: Louisville, 2008. p.411.

### **Jesus Is Still the Talk of the Town**

And, here's why that's so deeply important ... We live in a world of war, poverty, disease, prejudice, hate, fear, and sinfulness. Different places and different people around the world experience oppression, starvation, violence, discrimination, and hopelessness every single day. But, wherever those issues and places exist, the risen Christ shows up because the church—the people of God—show up to do something about it!

The same Jesus and Lord who ate with his disciples, and with sinners of all stripes, and with tax collectors, and with Pharisees, and who showed his resurrection power by eating with his inner circle once again as the risen Christ—that same Jesus and Lord shows his resurrection power to the world by feeding the hungry and offering comfort, mercy, and love. The same Jesus and Lord who broke the bonds of death, breaks the bonds of oppression and suffering every single day. The same Jesus and Lord who was bigger than the earthly, human powers of his own day is bigger than any of the ugliness of our world today—even if we can't see it with our own two eyes. And, as such, people keep talking about Jesus, and God's story goes on.

### **The Story Is Never Over**

People talk about how the risen Christ, through the presence of God's church in the world, continues to make himself known to us in ways large and small. And, Jesus' post-Easter appearances in scripture assure us that God is alive and well even now, working on behalf of wholeness, community, peace, harmony, grace, and love ... which means that the story is never over because like the disciples in today's story, Jesus commissions us, as the church, to again and again go (out there) and tell—to go out into the world and declare the power and presence of God in the midst of everything ugly in this world.

Yes, sometimes we may be startled. And, sometimes we may feel puzzled or bewildered. We may even have our share of doubts and disbeliefs. But, like the remaining disciples hiding in a secret room long ago, we will always have our hearts and minds opened by Christ's presence—a presence that changes us—it changes our faith, it changes our hope, and it changes our actions. And, God's

story goes on because we want it to change other people, too—changing their faith and their hope and their actions—so we can all work together to make this a better world.

Truly, as people of faith, we are to be witnesses to what God is accomplishing everywhere around us, and we are to keep telling God’s story, by our words and by our actions, with our hands and with our feet. Because no matter how ugly the world may seem, and no matter how hard the work may be, our faith demands nothing less of us!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.