

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Reflections for Emmaus Groups at St. Stephen's Church, Richmond, Virginia

Preparing for Sunday, April 15, 2018 // Easter 3, Year B

The Gospel: Luke 24:36b-48

While the disciples were telling how they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

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." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, 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."

Background and general observations

This passage follows the well-known and much-loved story of the disciples who encounter Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). You may remember that these disciples walked and talked at length with Jesus, but did not recognize him until they urged Jesus to stay with them at the end of their journey. "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight." (Luke 24:30-31)

After reflecting how their hearts had "burned within them" while they had talked with Jesus, these disciples got up and returned to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, they found the 11 disciples and told them what had happened on the road to Emmaus and about how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread. This is where our passage begins. "While the disciples were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'"

It is interesting how this story unfolds. It is almost as if Jesus "materializes" in their midst. They are talking about the Emmaus experience, and suddenly Jesus is standing among them. But as odd as this "appearance" is, it is clear that Luke is taking great pains to point out the physicality of the resurrected Jesus. The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost, and we might wonder what sort of presence this resurrected Jesus is. He might be a physical, corporeal presence, but something about him is clearly different.

Even so, Luke wants to make it very clear—this is not a ghost or pure spirit. This resurrected Jesus invites the disciples to touch him. He shows them his hands and feet. He asks them for something to eat and they gave him some broiled fish. Such detailed recounting of the physicality of the appearance is surely intended to tell us something important.

Ideas for discussing the application of this lesson to our daily lives

1. How do you encounter or perceive the Divine in your life?

Many people note that when we are confused, depressed, or anxious, we are not likely to sense God's presence and activity in our lives; in other words, our eyes are kept from seeing and we are, in a sense, blind to certain truths because of our suffering. This particular blindness might be especially acute when we are fearful, when we have been treated poorly, or been disappointed, or when we realize we have fallen short of our own expectations, or somehow failed other people. However, quite often in hindsight, we can look back on such difficult times in our lives and see how God in fact was present and at work, even though we were kept from seeing so at the time.

What do you know about the experience of not recognizing the Divine Presence in your midst? What are some of the things that hinder you from seeing what God desires you to see?

Do you tend to think of God or the Divine as something that is hidden in heaven? Or is the Divine, as in the story of the Risen Christ here, seeking to bring you peace in your daily life, urging you not to be afraid, and beckoning you somehow to see, hear and touch for yourself?

2. When we say that someone is a very "spiritual" person, do we mean that that person is otherworldly somehow, or is a spiritual person one who is deeply engaged with the world? Or, both? Would you say you are a "spiritual" person? If so, what would you mean by that?

3. Do you prefer an incorporeal Jesus—that is, an intangible, ethereal, even ghostly Jesus—to one who seeks to meet us in the touchable, lovable people in our everyday lives?

Both this story and the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus should remind us that Jesus promised he would be with us always. And though it is sometimes easy to lose sight (literally and figuratively!) of how and where Christ is present in certain situations (particularly difficult ones), it is helpful to stop, return our attention to God, and ask ourselves, "Where is Christ now?" It almost always makes a difference.

4. "...see that it is I myself. Touch me and see..."

Jesus conveys an eagerness to be known and even touched. Where do you experience that same longing in your life? Do you know anything about pretending that you do not need such recognition, acceptance, and even physical signs of affection from others?

This story illuminates the idea that we are most likely to recognize, discover, or encounter God in tangible acts of love. When has love been a catalyst for encountering God in your life? Can you think of other examples—either from your own life or from scripture—that illustrate ways in which "God is love"?

Consider the difference between an attractive person who is easy to embrace and a less attractive person whose presence and demeanor might be off-putting to some. Ponder the importance of a "rocking ministry" in which volunteers are recruited to rock newborns in the hospital, babies whose parents perhaps have abandoned them...consider the calming effect of human touch for anyone experiencing anxiety or isolation. And think about people whose

experience of being touched triggers fear of being used or manipulated, people who suspect that when someone touches them, the one touching probably has ulterior motives, often sexual.

How do you reflect on your experience of touching, your decision to refrain from touching, and your experience of being touched? Where is God in all of this?

5. “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.” (24:46-48)

One might say that “repentance and forgiveness of sins” is the central message for Christians.

What does that mean for you and how you choose to live your life?