

Easter 3 4-15-18
Luke 24:36b-48
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You Are Witnesses of These Things

“Mere words have something of quicksand about them. Only experience is the rope that is thrown to us.” (Georges Bataille, *The Naked Now*, p.84)

I read this quote recently and immediately thought, “That’s what’s Jesus is trying to say after God raised him from the dead. “Mere words have something of quicksand about them. Only experience is the rope that is thrown to us.” (Georges Bataille, *The Naked Now*, p.84) *Experience* is the true way to grasp the celebration and gift of Easter. Of course, in each of the resurrection appearance, Jesus first uses words. He greets Mary Madeline with her name. Both last week and in today’s gospel, he enters the room and announces words of peace. Even on the road to Emmaus, he opens conversation with the two disciples by asking what they are discussing as they walk. As God’s incarnate Word, Jesus continues to use ordinary words - speaking a name, explaining scripture, offering comfort and peace.

Yet, from our Lenten focus on Jesus as the wisdom teacher, we know that Jesus knows the limitations of “mere words”. Whether with parables or bread and wine, he is never content with what’s obvious on the surface. He goes deeper than words. As with quicksand, words can suck us into a bottomless pit of debate and blind alleys. Words can become rote and stale of current meaning. We can easily exchange words for the real deal. So, Jesus keeps presenting himself as he began: vulnerable. To use the metaphor: Jesus keeps throwing the rope of experience, his resurrection experience of both death and new life, of both wounds and wholeness, of both body and soul.

Jesus keeps pushing deeper into the complexity and paradox of life, of life as it presents itself, not life as imagined or deserved. For only paradox holds together those opposites we so quickly want to avoid, dismiss, collapse into a Pollyanna absence of honesty and passion. If resurrection says anything to us, it must be that the abundant life beyond life’s wounds can only come when we push through the wounds to the deeper place of mystery. If resurrection says anything to us, it must be that letting go of certainty and quick answers leads to the path of the peace we seek.

Thus, it is no surprise that Jesus speaks of repentance and forgiveness in today’s resurrection appearance. Could there be two better examples of letting go while touching on the wounds? Trusting mystery while entering new life? For repentance and forgiveness only emerge by holding on to paradox. Repentance and forgiveness only emerge by being willing to live anew. Remember that the original word of repentance is “metamonia” which means getting into a larger mind. And minds can only stretch when released from the bonds of “either/or” and enter the peace of “both/and”. Here is Richard Rohr’ list of Jesus’ opposites: “human yet divine, heavenly yet earthly, physical yet spiritual, possessing a male body yet a female soul, killed yet

alive, powerless yet powerful, victim yet victor, failure yet redeemer, marginalized yet center, singular yet everyone, incarnate yet cosmic, nailed yet liberated, resolving the great philosophical problem of the one and the many.” (*The Naked Now*, p. 147) To hear that list stretches us to see life, ourselves and others as more complex and a paradox for which to be grateful. Jesus shows us that as long as we insist on just seeing “this” and “that”, polarities, opposites, we can never follow him and live his life.

The same is also true if we want to forgive. There is no way to arrive at this spiritual peace with an either/or stance. Dividing the hurtful event, the words, the people, the outcome into two opposing camps makes forgiveness impossible. New life can’t emerge by boxing people or actions into right/wrong, dumb/wise, mine/yours, mean/compassionate, better/worse. Jesus shows us that - by his life and even more powerfully by his death and resurrection. It is no wonder that he speaks of forgiveness from the cross. He could have so easily chosen to blame, ridicule, shame. No one then or now would be surprised. Yet, Jesus lets go and allows the deeper mystery of love to speak louder and more powerfully. Jesus opens himself to faith and holds on to hope long enough for love to work from the inside out.

That work of love is called resurrection and Jesus keeps inviting us to join him in the experience. For “Mere words have something of quicksand about them. Only experience is the rope that is thrown to us.” (Georges Bataille, *The Naked Now*, p.84). Finally, only experience that creates witnesses. That is what Jesus calls us: witnesses. “You are witnesses of these things.”, he tells his disciples. Yet again, I believe he is pushing deeper beyond the obvious meaning. Jesus isn’t just saying, “Believe in me - that God raised me from the dead. There is more.” Jesus’ appearances are also meant to urge us to follow him and live God’s new life ourselves.

For don’t we all hold the same opposites and paradox within ourselves. Don’t we experience the same with other people, in all life situations? In every moment, we too have our wounds. We always carry the scars. I remember someone telling me soon after I was divorced that I would always be divorced. It would be like a scar on my face. And yet, over time, I and others would come to just accept that as part of my journey. Wonderfully, my journey following Jesus has moved me from merely hearing the word “forgiveness” to experiencing this grace in my own body and soul. To follow Jesus is to come through the mystery of death and enter more deeply into love. So, practice repentance and forgiveness, stretch your mind and hold the tension of paradox and be surprised when you find yourself more deeply in the experience of resurrection.

That’s where Jesus keeps trying to lead us. Amen.