

THE POWER OF THE UNKNOWN

[written in oral form]

Luke 24:36-48
Easter 3, Year B

April 18, 2021
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Last Sunday, we were presented John's version of resurrected Jesus visiting the disciples. Today we have Luke's.

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The 11 disciples, fearing for their lives for being followers of Jesus, were in hiding. In essence, they were in a stay-at-home lock down. Being out in the public was dangerous.

Normal life had come to an end. Their situation was much like being in a pandemic. What they once knew was gone,... And they were unemployed.

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Clustered in a safe place, Peter was sitting in a corner with headphones on listening to Billie Eilish singing, "When the party is over."

Andrew was doing the same, but was listening to "St. Stephen" by the Grateful Dead.

John preferred Mussorgsky. No one was talking.

Then, there was a coded knock on the door.

Some followers who had been on the road to Emmaus came in.

They told about their surprising encounter with Jesus.

They mentioned it was amazing, but also creepy.

They said that as soon as they realized that it was Jesus, he just disappeared. He vanished. He was gone.

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Thomas replied, "No way. I really doubt you met Jesus."

Then...all of sudden, Jesus appeared in their midst.

A few screamed because they thought they were seeing a ghost.

Jesus calmly said, "Peace be with you."

All was still and quiet.

Jesus broke the ice with, "Hey guys, it's me; no kidding, look, check out the holes in my hands and feet. Can you believe it?

I am alive; it's me!

I'm not an apparition or a ghost. It's me,... and do you guys got any food?

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I love the line in verse 41, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering."

Baffled and disbelieving in joy. That is the feeling of being in a miracle, such as a surprise homecoming.

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*I'm not sure how a body can instantly vanish and also digest food?*

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I think this was Luke's way of showing that Jesus was human AND Divine.

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They ate, and Jesus talked with them. They embraced their past, and came to understand how the past was also their present and their future. They saw clearly!

According to verse 45 – their minds were opened and they clearly understood the scriptures—their story, their past.

Jesus went on to say that the whole world needs to learn how repentance and forgiveness **is now understood** through Christ.

Because of Jesus we have a better understanding of God's love and grace.

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This is Luke's version of the "Great Commission."

Jesus told them, to bear witness to what they have experienced and learned, and to share it with all nations, with all people – beginning right where they were.

Moreover, even though Jesus was leaving, they would not be alone.

They were to wait in Jerusalem until God empowered them with God's Spirit.

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This was not a mandate to go out to judge and convert people.

This new job for them was to share what they had learned and experienced with God through Christ.

They were simply to share their stories.

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This was the seed that sprouted Christianity.

In the calamity and upheaval of their reality, in the midst of change and uncertainty something amazing and new began.

*In a way, "change" is an integral part of Christianity. I suppose that is why faith is so important.*

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From Jerusalem, the Gospel message spread and the church grew.

I think, the willingness to change and adapt was instrumental in Christianity's growth.

Many of the Jewish aspects were dropped, such as the purity laws, and some of the Gentile beliefs were stirred in,which made Christianity more palatable.

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The New Testament church was an influx of change, and it was inclusive.

Oh sure, they struggled, and groaned and moaned about the changes and new people. But, for the most part, they chose the path, as Jesus did, to be open and accepting – to be inclusive.

For example, many of the new Christians and important workers in the early church were.... WOMEN!

In those days, the secular culture treated women as property.

It was a very radical thing to include them as equals.

It was shocking, yet insightful and adventuresome.

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Lots of non-traditional, non-ethnic Jewish people joined in, and it showed in their names, such as Chloe, Silvanus and Cephas.

These new people had new ideas, and they blended in some of their old ideas, too.

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This new way began in turmoil by believers sharing their God experiences with others.

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Repentance, the message of eternal hope and knowing God **was** appealing, but really nothing new and provocative.

Inclusiveness was appealing too, BUT the big attraction to Christianity was the message and action of LOVE!

*This was the big draw for the NT church—their love, God's love!

The Early Christians cared for each other; they helped those in need; they shared what they had; they uplifted and cared for the powerless.

They Did community well. And, they even loved their enemies; they did not violently revolt when persecuted.

Moreover, their gatherings were marked by “love feasts” where everyone was welcome.

Love is very powerful, and very appealing to those who feel alone, helpless and unloved.

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Back to the situation presented in the text.

Before Jesus arrived with his presence of peace, the disciples were feeling much like most of us are feeling in this pandemic:

Trapped, depressed, anxious and fatigued.

A dreadful dangerous threat is prowling about.

Necessary surgeries are delayed.

People are suffering in countless ways, including financially.

And, outside gatherings are not allowed.

Add to Trapped, depressed, anxious and fatigued, ...the fear of the agonizing "Unknown."

**The Unknown:** when will this end? When will the world be safe?

What will the transition back be like?

What will be the new reality? All are unknown.

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At a recent KW Ministerial Zoom meeting, we talked about the factor of the Unknown. All of us were burdened by the unknown.

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We accepted that we are in the midst of a tempest of change.

So much has and will change.

Nevertheless, the truth be told, we have always been in the realm of change.  
I think the pandemic pause has forced us to better see the change.

Consider that a 100 years ago, 75% of the population was employed in agriculture. Now it is less than 2% [Parish paper 6/03]

Twenty years ago, a person tried to live close to work to limit travel time. Now, for many people, location is not an issue.  
Technology has radically changed life style in just 30 years.

Moreover, we have changed.  
We are not the Mennonites of 1995,... or even 2015.  
We are changing. Circumstances and attitudes are changing.

Just as the NT church embraced change, to be relevant, we must continue to change.

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This pandemic has disturbed us, and there is an opportunity in this.
Just as with the disciples, there is potential in this crisis.
The old normal routines are over. We are facing a new reality.
The disruption has shaken off the dust of routine. We can see better.

Today's text is for us. It is a message of hope and a new purpose.

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There are so many people in our society who are suffering alone, who need community and need love.

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We do community well, and we are loving people.
Perhaps, we can share our stories, old and new.

Perhaps, as the disciples did, we can tell about our faith experiences, both good and bad.
Who knows, something amazing may happen?
Including, we may change. ???

Yet,.....yet....there is the unknown--the dreadful unknown

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I'll share a story from my past.

In the Niagara region, there is a little town call Crystal Beach.
Years ago, it was a popular resort destination.
It had a lovely "Coney Island" type amusement part with lots of rides and things. There was an enchanting Fun house there called the "Magic Carpet."

My great aunt and uncle, and for a while, my great grandmother, lived in the nearby town of Ridgeway.
When we visited them in the summertime, we would usually go to Crystal Beach, too.

By the time I was 7 or 8, I was tall enough to ride all the rides, but I was hesitant to go into the "Fun House" because I heard it was not all fun.

I was told that there was a room full of cool mirrors and another with shifting floors. The journey through the castle-looking-building ended with a bumpy ride down a long, rug covered conveyor belt -- called the Magic carpet.

However, I heard that there was a long, dark corridor, in the middle, where scary things would happen. To make matters worse, they would only allow people to go through well spaced, One at a time.

I wanted the fun part and not the unknown, scary parts, and I did not want to be alone..... but that was not how things were.

Life is a bit like that.

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I paced back and forth by the entrance--wanting to go through it, but afraid to.

My father picked up on my torment, and said, "I'll send your sister through, and then you will see that it is okay." My sister is five years older than me. She reluctantly did. She was no longer enthralled by the Magic Carpet.

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Five minutes passed by, then ten, and finally she came out.

She walked to me, and told me all about the experience.

She shared the good parts, and warned me about the dark and scary section, and added..... "when it gets dark and things jump out at you,..... just keep going; just keep going.... because it gets better after that, and then at the end is the ride down.

She told me her story of her experience, and that was helpful.

So, with that assurance, and the desire to prove that I was bold and brave, I got a ticket and entered the building; it was a big U shaped building.

The first section had some fun and challenging things, like shifting stairs and tilted rooms with optical illusions. I was feeling pretty good about myself, and a little smug for being so brave.

However, as I turned the corner into the mid section, things became dark.

I felt the walls as I hesitantly walked down the black corridor, and then all of a sudden there was a flash of red light and a monster thing swung down from above.

I jumped forward, and then I was shocked with air jets and the sound of rattling chains.

Again, I leaped ahead, and then it seemed to get darker..... and it was very quiet.

Somehow, I got mixed up. I didn't know which direction to go, so I stopped. It was all Unknown. I was all alone, and it was dark..... very dark, and I was terrified.

I didn't know what to do.....so, I screamed out, hoping against hope that I would be heard. I screamed, "HELP!"

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And then, I heard the calm voice of my father say, "It's okay; I'm right here behind you."

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My father had bought a ticket and followed me. I guess he knew.

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I was NOT alone. It was dark and scary, but I was Not alone.

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We are not alone. God is with us and we have each other.

Yes, we are faced with the unknown.

However, the future was Always unknown.

We have always lived in the unknown.

This pandemic has enlightened us, and there is great potential in that insight.

We can now see how much we need God and our community.

This vision is before us, and it sounds like, "Peace be with you."

We can resonate with the disciples:

"While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering."

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And finally, I pray we find the courage to share our stories with those outside of our community.

Our story may include our screams, our tears and our laughing, and it may include when we are the calming voice.

We tell our stories for a reason which is to help those who are also stumbling through the corridors of life.

This is our faith journey, too.

Carl Jung said,

"That which you most need will be found where you least want to look."

Our eyes are opening up. Let us look in faith and see what will be.