

I John 3:17-22  
Acts 3: 1-10  
Luke 24: 36- 49

Stay Here in the City  
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Jon Kabat-Zinn the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction expert, wrote a book in 1994 called Wherever You Go, There You Are. This title may cause you to say, “That’s profound,” or “Duh,” because it seems like the truth, but an obvious truth. I came here this morning, and here I am, talking to you. But Kabat-Zinn is encouraging us to be more mindful of where we are. He writes: “If we hope to go anywhere or develop ourselves in any way, we can only step from where we are standing. If we don’t really know where we are standing... We may only go in circles...”

So, where are we standing, liturgically speaking? We are in the third Sunday of the Easter season, and we are still reading about the first Easter in the Gospels. In fact, in the 3 Sundays of Easter so far, we have heard from 3 different Gospels: the last chapter of Mark on Easter Day, the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John last week, and the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke today. Reading the Gospels this way can be a little confusing, a bit like going in circles. All of them are pretty clear that Jesus was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem during the festival of Passover. All of them say that he was buried. All of them say that women found that the tomb was empty on the first day of the week. But there are many different ways of describing all this, and the aftermath of the resurrection. Mark has an empty tomb but no resurrection appearance. Matthew has Jesus meeting 2 women near the tomb, and then appearing to the male disciples on a mountain top a hundred miles north in Galilee. John has Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene near the tomb, then to 10 disciples in a locked room in Jerusalem, then to 11 disciples in the same room a week later, then to 7 disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke has no appearance of Jesus near the tomb, but 2 disciples meeting him on the road to a suburb of Jerusalem, then this meeting, just described in the reading today, with those 2 plus eleven disciples plus their companions in a house in Jerusalem itself. It’s confusing. These four Gospels do not harmonize very well; these different strands of tradition make us wonder exactly which trajectory we should follow. Where do people meet Jesus and where do they go once this happens?

Today’s reading has a very clear order from Jesus: “stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” No talk of going back to their home base in Galilee at all. Those of us who have read the book of Acts, part 2 of Luke’s history, know that this is a set-up for the Pentecost event – the promised reception of power from on high. In Luke’s narrative, it is very important that all this takes place in Jerusalem, marrying the brand new Christian church with the ancient worship center of Judaism. This places us, on this third Sunday in Easter, in an in-between time. The new age has begun, but we are still waiting for the power. It is a time when we reflect carefully on how Jesus has just appeared to the disciples, hoping to find there some clues about what to do next. We don’t want to go walking in circles, so where are we standing?

The bereaved friends of Jesus are standing in a room, having heard a hopeful word about the possibility, just the possibility of resurrection from those people walking to Emmaus. They see the risen Jesus for themselves, but are afraid – paralyzed, it seems, by superstitious fear. This is one more in the genre of “lack of recognition” story that is common to all the Gospels. So what does

Jesus do to re-introduce himself? He shows them his wounded hands and feet, and invites his frightened friends to both see and touch them. How strange to use this particular quality, the evidence of his pain, as a sign of who he is. Not a triumphant, clean, powerful figure, but a wounded friend. Then, when they are teetering between joy and disbelief, he makes one more request: “Is there anything here to eat?” Not only is their teacher appearing before them, not only is he clearly bearing wounds, but he is hungry!

How could his friends look at his feet and not think of the miles walked in his company? How could the disciples look at his hands and not remember them lifted in blessing or breaking bread? How could his friends hear him ask, “Have you anything here to eat?” and not re-live that day when he looked at a hungry crowd and said, “You give them something to eat.”

Jesus stood among them. Jesus is wounded. Jesus is hungry. What were they going to do about it? What are we going to do about it?

Well, that Easter Day long ago, they gave him some fish to eat. A literal sort of response. But we know that Jesus was hungry before and after his crucifixion for other things too: for justice, for mercy, for life-changing freedom from shame. We can start with the literal, and feed someone who asks for food. But Jesus had always taught about deeper hungers and deeper healing. For all people, not just for some. After his fish snack, Jesus continues to teach: “he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,” as it says. Starting in Jerusalem, they are to proclaim and enact forgiveness of sins to all nations. Stay here in the city. Start where you are standing.

In our reading from Acts, we see what two of the disciples, Peter and John, find to do in the city. This is after Pentecost, and they are much braver, showing themselves publicly and preaching. And they go about their daily business, worshiping at prayer hour in the Temple like the good Jews they are. But now their eyes have been opened to the wounded and hungry world in a new way. Staying in the city, they encounter their work right in front of them: a man begging for alms who has been lame from birth. The text says that they looked intently at him, perhaps recognizing in him something that has escaped them before. They see a deeper need than alms – and they don’t have money anyway. But they don’t keep walking...they don’t want to walk into the Temple on their own. They want to bring this man from the edges in, and they want him to get their on his own two feet. Whatever you think about the possibility of miracles – either those of Jesus or those of his followers – we see in their compassionate choices a way forward, a way to conceive of ministry in the city and beyond.

People start where they are standing, or you might say, where they have been placed. They start their ministry where they are. The book *Pastrix*, written by Nadia Bolz-Weber, tells the story of a woman (the author) who finds her calling in Denver, mostly pastoring those who felt excluded from the church: gay, lesbian, transgendered, the addicted and recovering, a truly wounded and hungry group of people. But they do not sit in their sanctuary, taking care of their own pain, because that is not the Way of Jesus. They stay in their city and minister there. They look for more wounded and hungry people. One of their projects is Operation Turkey Sandwich. They bag up lunch bags with freshly roasted turkey, stuffing muffins, pumpkin pie bars. 600 bags. Then they drive and walk around, giving them to anyone who was working on Thanksgiving Day: gas station attendants, bus drivers, bartenders, hospital janitors. A clerk in the adult bookstore tears up as he is handed an OTS bag and says, “Wait. Your church brought me Thanksgiving lunch...here?” The wounds and hunger of the resurrected Jesus sends them into every corner of their city.

Where do we stand today? We do not stand in Denver or Jerusalem. Right now, we are at 15 Church St. in Norwich. There are people and there is a community in our equivalent of the city. And here, I think is our challenge. The pain and the wounds and the hunger (as well as the injustice and the violence) are there – this is the human condition, in many ways. But in our “mission field” as it is sometimes called, the wounds and hunger of Christ are perhaps more hidden. We look pretty good. Many in our community are successful in their work – they don’t sit and beg for alms at the doorway of the church. Many in our community are successful enough to be generous with their time and money, and we are happy to be generous as a church in the same way. In some ways, our wounds and hungers are masked by the idyllic appearance of our “city.” I know that communities of privilege – with all the power that education and opportunity provide - have their own needs and the potential to be “clothed with power from on high.” How do we live out the commission of Jesus – wounded, hungry Jesus – in our own setting?

We could share the experience of those frightened, joyful, and disbelieving friends who saw the wounds, heard his voice, fed his hunger, and received his love. We could share it when we feed the hungry, touch the wounded, break bread together, thirst for a deeper drink of God’s blessing, and respond to the Spirit’s power, seeking to serve other’s in God’s name. Amen.