**Text**: **Luke 24:-36b-48**

**The Bethel Pulpit**

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Why does Jesus make one last appearance to his disciples? A few of them have found out who he was when they broke bread together. The first to meet Jesus and have their hearts and eyes opened to who Jesus was headed back to Jerusalem to tell the eleven remaining disciples all that they had seen and heard. They must have forgotten to tell the story.

It turns out the resurrection has more to it than waiting around to die so that we can live into the promise of eternal life. And Jesus wants to make sure that the remaining 11 disciples and the others who has joined them understand his words, “You are witnesses of these things.” The first disciples and all of us are witnesses to these things – we are witnesses to the power of God who raises Jesus from the dead and christens us to go out and tell the story. The story of God’s mercy and love and forgiveness. A story that turns ugliness of the world into something wondrous.

There is more for us to tell. As Easter people, we are called to witness to the ways that our own lives have been transformed. We are called to tell how Jesus’ claim on us has changed us. We stumble as we try to pinpoint and name and tell our own powerful stories, but we must tell them. How do we witness to the resurrection in these times?

Most days it’s easier for me to become immersed in the planning and responsibilities of being a pastor and my own life. The resurrection becomes only about the past and some distant future when Jesus returns. This closes the door to the possibilities that the rising of Jesus has real meaning for us today in our present reality.

What difference does Easter have for today? Right now. What does the resurrection look like today? Others need to know that Jesus is with you in the vulnerable places of our lives. So here it goes. My witness to you of the resurrection through my eyes in the present.

This is just about the last place I ever expected to be; being here is right up there with being president of the United States or the Queen of England.  Yet here I am.  Under the heavy influence of our texts this morning and at the continued urging of someone who knows most of the details of my life, I share a bit of my history to reveal God’s power to make something new resurrection style.

Let me set your mind at ease, I am not going back to the day Martha was born.  At the time I was accepted into seminary, I had never even read a Sunday morning reading from the Bible.  Standing up in front of a congregation to read filled me with terror.  I suppose that is one of the reasons it took me so long to respond to the Spirit’s call to become a pastor.   Of course, I thought the Spirit was crazy tapping me out to stand up and preach on Sunday morning.  I tried dragging my feet but the poking and the prodding wouldn’t let up until I started making phone calls and filling out papers to begin classes.  I was startled and terrified; I didn’t see any ghosts, but I seriously thought God was making a huge mistake.  If I could have seen those nail scarred hands and feet, I might have been able to believe but that’s not an option for us is it?  There was joy mixed with doubt.

At the heart of my unbelief and fear was my own self-loathing.  There was plenty of God’s amazing grace in the world for all of you, but not enough for me.  The world we live in is overloaded with voices telling us “you are no good, you are ugly, you are worthless, you are nobody - unless you can demonstrate the opposite.”  Henri Nouwen in Life of the Beloved says, “These negative voices are so loud and so persistent that it is easy to believe them.  That’s the great trap.  It is the trap of self-rejection”

I was so fearful of leading worship or anything in front of others that I had to wear a turtle neck to cover up the red blush of emotion.  The cover up worked well in the winter months, but not so well in the 90 degree late spring heat in Iowa.  I practiced and practiced and practiced liturgy I had known for years trying to be acceptable.   The first time I read the lessons on Sunday morning, I thought I was going to throw up.  Clearly, God had more confidence in me than I could muster myself.  I was denying the central message of the faith.  I thought I was loving God with most of my heart, but loving God is hard to do when you think you are unlovable.

I needed a heart adjustment.  I needed God to turn me around to lead me to repentance.  I needed God to help me believe I am acceptable and lovable.  I couldn’t do it on my own.  I needed the power of God to change me.  It took a lot of work and time.  I needed forgiveness for not being able to trust that God equips us for the whatever job we are called to do in his name.  I needed the promises of the resurrection now in between Easter and the time Jesus returns.  I needed to know the healing power of being forgiven because it is in that forgiveness that God changed me leaving with me with new hope and new possibilities.   Thanks be to God!!!

  In the resurrection, we learn that repentance and forgiveness are central to God’s mission.  God turns us away from sin making it possible to see ourselves and our neighbors with God’s eyes, and then we celebrate God’s forgiveness.  This forgiveness of sin isn’t just an individual matter; forgiveness and repentance is much wider.  They are God’s agenda to change individuals and to turn the world.  Listen to the news, read the newspaper, look around your work place or your school - you quickly see much of the time it’s a dog eat dog world.  Most of the time all parties involved share some responsibility for the violence, the injustice, and the pain inflicted on our neighbors.  For people of faith, the only way forward, the only way out of the chaos is the way we find the hardest: forgiveness.  It is the way God creates new possibilities.  It is the way the resurrection has meaning for us today.  As Luke says, “You are witnesses of these things.”

Jesus had to suffer and die and rise from the dead, so that his name will be proclaimed for bringing about repentance and the forgiveness of sins. His resurrection is just the beginning; he invites us to be actively involved in spreading the good news that his love changes us.

Your own stories matter. Tell them. Where has the power of the resurrection transformed your life? Don’t worry about telling it perfectly; trust that Jesus has called you to tell your story. Your story reveals his story of love. Jesus returned to the disciples three times after the resurrection to emphasize the importance of telling the stories of how you have been turned around and made new, how you have done what couldn’t be done – not on your own power, but with the power of God leading you and preparing you. Your story is written on the heart of God; in light of Jesus’ resurrection, your story matters. Tell it, so others will know the power and love of God.