

Appearance, Transformation, Witness

Acts 3: 12-20

Luke 24: 36-48

April 26, 2009

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Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

What is your favourite story of Jesus?

Wait for answers...

I sent that question out via email to the congregation and got a couple of replies.

Pat Wrin wrote:

My favourite story of Jesus is how he took the time to talk to the Samaritan woman and asked her for a drink of water.

In doing so he acknowledged that God appreciates all of his followers whether they are rich or not and women were important to Jesus and to God.

He didn't believe in certain people being the untouchables.

He valued the least important in society.

Howard Stillman wrote: I have two - (a) His birth and events leading up to it - the whole story - my favourite time of the year!

(b) The Garden scene - even Jesus, the Son of God, showed his very human side in his fear of death to come, he loved this earth and his human friends so much that he did not want to leave at this time to go to Heaven.

There is just something special about "we humans" that even the "Heavens" adore!

It gives one "peace of mind" knowing that someone cares in a place so far away, that one day we may be a part of - on that Final Day when the "Book of Life" will be read.

These stories reflect the many different experiences people had of Jesus.

We have the Jesus of justice...

The Jesus of miracles...

Jesus as friend...

Jesus as healer...

Jesus the guy who kicks us in the butt when we need it the most...

Jesus the man who appeared just when things seemed to be lowest and darkest.

The gospel reading this morning, with Jesus' appearance into a locked room has them terrified!

Wouldn't you be?

Hiding in a locked room from the authorities for fear that they would wind up like Jesus, he is suddenly present.

Their joy and terror must have intermingled.

Joy at his presence... and terror thinking he was a ghost...

And in a scene in which I believe Jesus displays both a sense of humour and compassion, he asks them for something to eat....

Is there anything more basic and earthy than eating?

Anything that links us so profoundly with the things of this world than the necessity of feeding our bodies on a regular basis?

He could have talked to them for hours trying to convince them and they still might not have believed... but in asking for something to eat... something to sustain his physical needs... his presence suddenly became real to them.

Intellectual reasoning has little power compared with personal experience

I don't know how to describe that presence... a presence that was able to come into a locked room... and yet one who needed the sustenance of food...

But that presence was so powerful that it transformed the disciples from fearful people into ones who went on to do Jesus work: preaching, teaching and healing.

And to share the stories of Jesus... the man they knew as teacher and friend... and the one who rose from the dead after dying on a cross.

Just look at Peter... he continues to have the same characteristics he always did... he continues to be rash, impetuous and impulsive...

But his denial of knowing Jesus on Good Friday has been transformed into preaching about him!

Into a belief so strong that suddenly he is filled with passion and confidence and preaches in the temple of Jesus power and promise...

Peter, being Peter, takes it one step too far...

He seems to forget that he denied Jesus... just as surely as anyone else... he points fingers... if we go back to the reading from Acts, there is a lot of you did this, you did that...

I hope you don't hear that from me when I preach... I hope you hear me say 'we...' because I find the gospel just as challenging as any one of you do.

But the power of God's presence tells us that like Peter none of us have to be constrained by our past... we can become more than what we were...

Larry Rasmussen writes, "The perennial Christian strategy, someone has said, is to gather the folks, bread the bread, and tell the stories."

We do this formally within worship as we celebrate communion and listen for the word of God for us today.

We do it casually as we gather around our kitchen or dining room tables for a meal and share the day with family members.

We tell stories of our days... and in those stories are threads of the larger story of God's presence and witness... a kindness offered... a listening ear... a shared meal... a wrong confessed and forgiven... and of course the everyday dynamics of 'that's not fair!' that our children are so quick to point out to us!

Those kinds of stories are threaded through our scripture just as surely as the ones of healing and hope are... they are part of the whole tapestry of scripture and of life.

Each of us will experience God and Jesus in a completely different way... even those who have the same favourite stories will draw something different from them...

It doesn't matter which image or story of Jesus is your favourite or which one suits you the best at this time...

That is the enduring promise and power of God and Jesus... that they come to us as we need them...

And when we experience him, we can share him with the world...

Just like the first disciples did... both of our readings this morning speak of being witnesses...

I bet the scariest thing I could ask you to do would be to share your faith story with a neighbour...

But you don't necessarily have to use words... when we give time and attention to nurturing our faith development, we are witnessing to Jesus Christ.

When we spend Sunday morning in church you are telling the world that this is more important than what our consumer society says is important.

When we give money to the Mission and Service Fund, we are witnessing to Jesus Christ.

When we provide clothing to the Brunswick Street Mission, we are witnessing to Jesus Christ.

When we gather food for the food bank, we are witnessing to Jesus Christ.

When we visit the sick, we are witnessing to Jesus Christ.

When we... when we... when we... does anyone want to fill in one of those blanks?

I challenge each of you to come back next week with an example!

St. Francis of Assisi once said, “Preach the gospel, if necessary use words.”

But if someone asks you why you do these things... what will you tell them?
Appearance and experiences, transformation and witness...

Jesus is justice... miracles... friend... healer... companion... guide and so much more...

Thanks be to God, amen.