

“We Are Witnesses”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

April 14, 2024 - Third Sunday of Easter

[Acts 3:12-19; Luke 24:36-48](#)

How is everybody today? Doing well, I hope. And how is every *body* today? I hope also doing well. My guess, however, is that some of us would answer these two questions quite differently, that we may be generally OK (or at least state that we are), but that our bodies may not be helping the cause or are actively at work against us, while others of us are indeed doing very well both in body and overall. However it is that your body is doing right now, I hope that you leave here this morning feeling and doing a bit better, for I hope that you can identify today, and in all of this Easter season’s messages about resurrection life, something that helps you to witness to God’s resurrection power at work within both your body and spirit, working miracles of healing and growth that would lead you to having a greater sense of well-being in your whole person.

You may be thinking in this moment that the best way to have a greater sense of well-being would be to have a rejuvenating, sermon-length power nap. For those of who are able to stay awake as the preacher drones on, I hope that you would consider with me for just a few minutes our scripture lessons for today and some of the messages that God for us in them about God’s resurrection life at work in us.

Our gospel lesson today comes from the final chapter of Luke, and you may have noticed as we heard it read some distinct differences from the final words of Mark’s gospel that we read on Easter Sunday, which ended with three of the women who were Jesus’ followers seeing in his tomb not his body but an angelic messenger who told them that he had risen and then fleeing from the tomb in terror and amazement, saying nothing to anyone about what they had seen there because of their great fear. According to Luke’s gospel, however, the women -- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others -- were not silenced by fear, but went to the other disciples to tell them what they had witnessed at the tomb, which included not one but two angelic messengers proclaiming to them that Jesus had risen. Luke records that Peter then ran to the tomb and also saw that it was empty and that two other followers of Jesus then

had an encounter with the resurrected Christ, who met them as they traveled the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It was when the disciples were gathered together again in Jerusalem that night that Jesus appeared to them all, standing among them and offering a word of peace. Understandably terrified and thinking they were seeing a disembodied ghost, Jesus showed them his very real resurrection body, still marked by the nails that once fastened his hands and feet to a Roman cross. Jesus invited them to not only see his body, but to touch it, and then to serve his transformed-but-real body's needs by offering him some food.

In these moments, the first disciples witnessed with their own senses the resurrected Christ. They saw him as he appeared in their midst, heard him offering them a word of peace, touched the still-present marks of his crucifixion upon his hands and feet, and tasted and smelled a meal of fish that they shared with him. This gospel ends with the disciples sensing with their own bodies the good news of Christ's resurrection as they experienced for themselves the real presence of Christ's body.

But this gospel actually does not end there. This story at the end of Luke is not really an ending at all, for it is right in the middle of its author's two volume work about good news coming to the world through Christ. We read earlier from the second volume of this work, the Acts of the Apostles, which is a book about how the good work of Christ continued after his resurrection through the bodies of his disciples. Acts tells stories about how God worked through Jesus' followers to carry on his work of healing, teaching, and calling people to turn from their destructive ways, and we heard in today's lesson Peter teaching and calling for repentance after he had healed a man, in Jesus' name, who had been unable to walk. The result of this healing and Peter's bold speech after it was not rejoicing, except by the person who had been healed, who responded by leaping and praising God, but with Peter's arrest.

The Book of Acts goes on to tell about many other amazing deeds of the first disciples, and how time and again the response to their life-giving work was, for some, joy and faith, but for others, rejection and hostility. Still, they carried on Christ's work, just as Christ did, undaunted by danger, unhindered by wounds, as they travelled with their own wounded feet throughout the empire to tell people in lands near and far about the gospel of Christ and worked with their own

scarred hands to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and lift up the orphan and widow. Through the work of their own bodies, those first followers of Jesus effectively witnessed to the resurrection and so blessed many.

And we, followers of Christ of this generation, continue to use our own bodies to witness to the resurrection. Like the first followers, we can experience with our own bodies the resurrected Christ's presence. With our own senses we can recognize God at work in us and through us. When we hear and heed God's still-speaking voice, coming to us through scripture and song; when we see and rejoice for the miracles of new life sprouting and blossoming all around us; when we graciously offer and receive welcoming handshakes, hugs, and fist-bumps; when, from our abundance, we share gifts of food with others, we keep Christ embodied and we do his work of blessing every *body*. With our bodily senses, we witness Christ's resurrection power, and with the work of our bodies for the good of others, we are witnesses to that life-giving, renewing energy in the world.

Dear friends, do not be frozen in fear for the many dangers of this world, and do not be without hope that God can work miracles of new life among us, for God's miraculous power is still at work in each of us, in the life we share as a community, and in the lives of people throughout the world. Do not feel that the wounds you have received in this life, that perhaps may cause you even now to be hurting in body and spirit, are greater than God, who works spectacular miracles with and through wounded hands and feet. Today and always, may the peace of Christ be with you, may peace be in your body, and may you use your body to offer the blessing of peace to others. Amen.