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Sermon on Luke 24:36b-48
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Blessed to Be a Witness

5-4-3-2-1. In this moment, what are 5 things you can see? 4 things you can touch? 3 things you can hear? 2 things you can smell? 1 thing you can taste? Maybe you are familiar with this practice - designed to help ground you, to be more present and calm in the here and now. Be here now. It's written on a ring that I wear all the time as a reminder to me to be centered in this moment, right here, right now. Not an easy thing to do at all -- you might agree. Where do our minds want to go? To the past, ruminating on experiences and memories, dwelling on what could have been, feeling the pain, fear, or sadness from a time gone by. We often wish we could go back to when life was simpler, easier, or less complicated -- when we were young and less jaded. Or on the other side of things, we get stuck in worrying about what might happen in the future, all the possibilities, good or bad, of what could be coming along in life -- for ourselves and the ones we love, for our community, or for our earth. It goes against so much of our natural instincts and inclinations to face what is in front of us, to just be here now, in this present moment, as the moments come and go in the course of our lives.

Maybe this is what it was like for Jesus' disciples in the days following his death. Their minds had to have been such a jumble -- trying to make sense of what had just happened, as their friend was killed at the hands of the Romans and laid in a tomb...dead...done. The way of revolution, of a whole new way of being and doing life with Jesus seemed to be over. The promised Messiah was no more. This was all so confusing. What would the future hold now? What direction would their lives take with

this loss? Such was the nature of the scene that we enter into in today's Gospel. Jesus' friends and followers were gathered together in a room in Jerusalem. Two of his friends had been walking along a road to a village called Emmaus when someone they did not recognize appeared to them -- it was actually Jesus. After they had this encounter with Jesus these two met up with the other disciples and shared the shocking news: "The Lord has risen indeed." As they were talking about this, lo and behold, Jesus himself was suddenly there with them saying, "Peace be with you." It was just Jesus himself with no fanfare or flash, standing there inviting his friends to see his hands and feet, to touch him and take in his real bodily presence. Then he asks for some broiled fish. As this is happening, what would you see, feel, hear, smell, or taste? It all strikes me as such an embodied, visceral moment. Jesus' body there before them, clearly bearing the fresh wounds of crucifixion. Hearing his voice, taking in the energy of his presence. In response, there was terror, fear, doubt, and disbelief but also joy as Jesus' friends were caught, called to be present right then and there with the risen Jesus himself. Jesus blesses their gathered community by his appearance there with them and creates a sacred moment of inviting this community into providing hospitality and serving him food as a visitor in their midst. And then he reminds them of who he is as the Messiah, and his mission with them as the fulfillment of the scriptures. Finally, there is a commissioning to be witnesses of these things, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations.

What does this really mean to be a witness to these things? There is something to me that seems essential about simply being present to the personhood of Jesus and taking in that he is also God in the flesh. Jesus doesn't manifest as a disembodied voice

speaking philosophically about the implications of death and life. He shows up with hands and feet, flesh and bones, scars and wounds. So it doesn't make sense to me that we would over-spiritualize or remove Jesus from the nitty gritty, organic nature of life. As humans, we are embodied creatures, who experience all that we do in this life through our bodies, through our senses and nervous systems. And we have a God who entered into this very physical realm with us and whose body was resurrected. We have a God who honors and revels in physicality, who knows the danger enacted against human flesh, but declares that our endings in the here and now are not the end. Jesus' physical resurrection is God's offering of both compassion and justice: all that has been taken, broken, hurt, traumatized or forgotten will be restored. You are witnesses of these things, through your very body, your self, your story. Just as those first disciples were called to be present, despite their fear and confusion, and receive the promise of hope in the resurrected Jesus, so are we, too. Even if it seems crazy, Jesus is here, now, in this moment in time, saying to you and to me, "Peace be with you."

We are called to see that this revelation, Jesus showing up, continues day after day, moment after moment. And Jesus shows up, even in the midst of the most challenging circumstances we find ourselves in. In the wake of the police shooting of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, MN this last week, I read some helpful words from Angela Denker, an ELCA pastor in Minneapolis as she reflected on this and other recent events. She says: "Part of the experience of faith is that of ongoing revelation and that as God continues to reveal truth to each of us, sometimes growing in faith resembles fumbling around in a dimly lit room, unable to decipher what is right in front of our eyes. Revelation means confusion and shadows and uncertainty and then sometimes seeing

clearly what you once did not see. White America is seeing anew in Minnesota what Black Americans lived for far too long. Shattering of illusions always feels devastating for those who've built stories of ourselves around those illusions: land of the free, home of the brave, the American Dream.”

I agree with Angela's reflections and as we begin to see and feel the real pain and wounds that people have experienced because of systemic racism, we are in such a time of reckoning. We are called to be here now, to face with honesty what we need to face, to mourn and lament what simply is. But we do this also with the confidence that the resurrected Jesus is already here, already sowing seeds and cultivating hope and new life, restoring and healing that which is wounded and hurt within us and within all people. Our bodies carry all of this, and bear the stories of our witness to the redemption that is real through Jesus. God's gift to you, beloved children of God, is this: you are loved just as you are with a boundless, enduring love and the resurrected Jesus meets you, here and now. Wherever you are today, may you see, and feel, and hear, and smell, and taste this sacred promise, as you are blessed to be a witness to these things.