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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Psalm 4; Luke 24:36-53

22 May 2022

Stay Here

Greeting & Opening Prayer:

Please join me in prayer: God of resurrection and renewal, you have filled us with the hope of new life in your family. Give us patience and endurance as we receive your promised Holy Spirit, your sacred breath, in each moment. In Jesus name, Amen.

Message:

Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! This morning, we come to the end of our last resurrection narrative. We have journeyed with the gospel writers since Easter, wondering and puzzling over the significance and good news of Jesus's resurrection. At the sound of our names, we hear, recognize, and worship the risen Jesus as Mary Magdalene did in John's story of the resurrection. In fear and silence in Mark, we stood with the women at the empty tomb as the young man seated there explains the fanciful news of Jesus no longer being dead. In Matthew's resurrection story, we receive Jesus' words of sending to go and tell everyone of the hope that we have as well as the promise of his faithful presence until heaven and earth become one. Two weeks ago then, we began Luke's story of the risen Jesus of Nazareth. We listened in as Mary Magdalene and the other women tried to explain to the eleven disciples what they had heard from the two messengers at the tomb. It takes several more stories from those who meet the resurrected Jesus before the energy really begins to build. Two followers on the way to Emmaus

walk, talk, and eat with Jesus before he disappears, and when they return to Jerusalem, they find that Peter has also experienced Jesus's renewed presence. An idle tale, as the disciples once thought the words of their sister disciples were, has become something much, much bigger and earth-shattering. A seismic shift in the worldview of these followers of Jesus is beginning in this moment as they discuss together all that they have witnessed.

We enter the story in Luke 24:36 at this very time in the midst of the discussion in the upper room. "As they were talking about this," the gospel writer notes, Jesus suddenly stands among them and speaks peace to them, a reminder that he is not a malevolent, evil, or unclean spirit, ghost, or apparition. Even at Jesus's words of peace, the whole group is terrified. Yet Jesus holds the moment for them, asking them to notice beyond their immediate feelings of fear and doubt. Jesus tells them to notice his hands and his feet, to touch his body (for it is real in a sense but also different than what it was), and to witness his ability to eat, all reminders that the resurrection that they have always heard about is for their whole selves. God will leave nothing to waste but will renew and restore all of who we are, our minds, our hearts, our souls, and our bodies. True life is not out there in some far away heavenly rest for only our soul; no, true life is renewed life for all that God has created, including all that God created us to be, our physical bodies included.

When Jesus finishes his piece of fish, he explains all that he had taught while he was still with them before his execution by the Romans and then continues to explain how what has happened since his death, undergirds the truthfulness and reliability of all that he had already told them. Not only that, but this powerful witness to the possibilities of resurrection empowers the disciples to carry the message of repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to the rest of the world, to all nations. But before they go out, Jesus tells them to stay in the city until they

have been filled with power from on high. At this moment in verse 49, I wonder if they disciples begin to give Jesus confused looks again. Just when they were beginning to understand all that has happened already, Jesus offers them another puzzling command: “Stay here until the power to do all of this comes to you.”

This command must become even more disconcerting as the disciples follow Jesus out of the city of Jerusalem to Bethany where Jesus blesses them and then disappears again, withdrawn from their presence and carried to heaven. The author of Luke, looking back on this moment and writing about it, understands the significance of what is happening and writes that the disciples were filled with joy as they returned to Jerusalem and continued worshipping God in the temple continually. I can’t imagine that joy was the only emotion. I wonder if it was a silent walk back into Jerusalem as the disciples savored those brief moments before Jesus was gone again. Did some weep and grieve all over again in Jesus’s absence? Did others ask more and more questions, talking about what Jesus could mean by being clothed with power from on high? Did still others wonder if Jesus was going to appear to them again, only to be surprised that this moment was the last until all will be set right?

As we come away from the disciples immediate experience on that day, we marvel at the different ways that the gospel writers have brought their stories of Jesus to a close. Luke offers no moments in Galilee as the other three gospels do, nor does Luke give us a clean ending with all of the loose ends tied up. No, Luke entices us with an ending that is also a new beginning, not only for the disciples, but for the entire world, and it will be continued in the sequel to Luke’s gospel, the book of Acts. If you want to see how the story continues, how the disciples carry the good news of the risen Jesus of Nazareth, then you must continue reading in Acts.

However, I want to stop for a moment and reflect on two things that the gospel writer offers us in this conclusion or ending to this book. First, we hear Jesus's instruction to stay here and wait in Jerusalem. Trust me, Jesus says, and you will receive what has been promised in my absence. I wonder how difficult it was to stay. My tendency is to go, to tell, to keep moving, to talk, and to work, but what if this is a moment to hear the risen Jesus calling us to stay and wait? What would staying here and waiting for the direction and power of the Holy Spirit look like for you or me or all of us? Are we too busy to even be able to find a time to stay and wait?

Second, we must notice that this ending is also a political ending for its first-century audience. When people heard someone read or tell this ending, it would have very familiar. The first Caesar or emperor of the Roman Empire had ascended to his proper place among the Roman gods after his death, which was the proof that Caesar was the son of god and rightful ruler of the empire or the known world. Luke's story of Jesus ascending to heaven alive, even after the empire had ended his life, is Luke's way of telling the audience that what the empire is telling you is false. The true ruler of our universe is Jesus, the Messiah, the son of the Living God of Israel, the resurrected one who has shown us the way of repentance, forgiveness, and love. The new life that Jesus experienced after his execution is the new life that awaits all of us today and in the end. Though our bodies, minds, and hearts might be damaged and wounded through any number of horrible evils, we confidently walk in the new life that Jesus has sealed us with in the Holy Spirit, knowing that one day, we will be fully restored and renewed.

Closing Prayer: Let us pray: loving and forgiving God, you have brought resurrection to this world, even in the midst of great evil and suffering. Give us eyes to see how your renewal is reshaping us and the universe that you continue to restore in your power. Amen.