

April 14, 2024
Luke 24:36b-48

Easter 3
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

“I Love to Tell the Story”

“Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

Tell me a story!

I was one of those children who never wanted to go to bed at the assigned time and would try every trick in the book to delay bedtime for as long as possible. When my parents said “it’s time for bed,” I would try to negotiate an extension of at least five minutes. When that failed, I would say that I needed to use the bathroom, or wanted a glass of water. But my favourite delay tactic would be to ask my parents to read me a bedtime story before it was lights out. They would usually agree, and soon they would sit at my bedside and read one of my cherished children’s stories such as Jack and the Beanstalk, the Little Engine That Could, Winnie the Pooh, the Velveteen Rabbit, and any of a number of stories by Dr. Seuss. As much as I loved all these stories, my favourite stories were from my first Bible, an edition that told the biblical stories through pictures. My parents would read me stories of the birth of Jesus at Christmas, the visit of the Wise Men, Jesus and the children, the call of Zacchaeus, Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, and the resurrection on Easter Sunday. I would listen to these stories as I viewed the pictures and was always ready to hear more until my parents said that time was up and turned out the lights. These Bible stories that were originally a part of my stall tactics became the foundation of my interest in the Bible that has extended through all the years of my service in ordained ministry, my call to proclaim the Word of God that is ours in Holy Scripture.

The sharing of stories between parents and children remains a beloved and important tradition for families that reaches back thousands of years. These stories may include beloved children’s stories that have been shared for generations, stories about our families and the traditions that bind us together, and stories about our community and the importance of being good neighbours. Sharing stories has also been a way in which folklore and traditions are passed down from one generation to another; this was especially true in ancient cultures where printed materials were scarce, and cultures relied on oral tradition as a primary teaching tool. The telling of stories was more important than a pleasant pastime or a way to help our children

fall asleep; stories are central in teaching our children about who they are and what it means to live as a member of their families, their communities, and their nation. The people who had accepted Jesus' invitation to disciples and followed him were familiar with the importance of hearing and sharing stories. As observant Jews, they had heard the stories from the Hebrew Scriptures that included the Creation and Fall, Noah and the Flood, the call of Abraham, the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, and their liberation from slavery at Passover. These stories would have been heard from elders in their synagogues, at the Sabbath and Seder tables, and in stories they heard when they sat at the feet of learned teachers and rabbis. As disciples of Jesus, they often referred to him as "Rabbi," sitting at his feet on occasions such as the Sermon on the Mount along with thousands of others who came to hear the words of the one who *"taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."* (Matthew 7:29).

When Jesus asks his followers *"who do you say that I am?"* Peter speaks on behalf of the entire group of disciples when he answers, *"you are the Messiah, the son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:15-16). The knowledge they had gained from the stories that had been passed on to them along with their experience as witnesses to Jesus' teaching, healings, and miracles had led them to this confession of faith that the man from Nazareth was indeed the Messiah of God. But none of their previous experience sitting at the feet of learned elders had prepared them for Jesus' announcement that *"he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* (16:21). This so offends Peter that he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him; Jesus' response is to rebuke Peter and to warn his disciples that *"if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* (16:24). Jesus' prediction would come to pass when he enters Jerusalem, is arrested and sentenced to death, and dies on the cross. It was a moment of great sorrow and fear for the disciples who not only believed that their hopes for Jesus as the Messiah about whom they had learned from their ancestors had died and were buried along with Jesus; his final prediction of a resurrection did not inspire trust and hope among these followers who were now cowering behind locked doors, fear that the fate suffered by Jesus would soon be their fate as his disciples.

In Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus on the first Easter Sunday, Jesus does not at first appear to the women who come to the tomb only to discover that the body of Jesus is not present and hear the message of the angelic beings that ask them *"why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen"* (Luke 24:5). The first appearance of the risen Jesus occurs in a story unique to Luke, his account of two disciples traveling to Emmaus who are met by Jesus on the road, but

whose “*eyes were kept from recognizing him*” (24:16). After the disciples share with Jesus their perspective on what has happened in Jerusalem, and that “*we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*” (24:21), the Risen Lord chastises them and asks “*‘was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*” (24:26-27). After sharing the stories from the Hebrew Bible that speak of his fulfillment of God’s promises of a Messiah, Jesus accepts an invitation to stay with these travelers. When he sits down to table with them, he blessed and broke the bread, at which point “*their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*” (24:31). They immediately get up and return to Jerusalem, sharing with Jesus’ disciples the good news that “*the Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!*” (24:34).

The disciples have heard the witness of the women and the travelers from Emmaus about the resurrection of Jesus, but so far, they have not come into his presence. But this changes when “*while they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’*” (24:36). The report that Jesus stood among them echoes the language of appearances of angels in the Old Testament (“*Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man.*” Daniel 8:15). This account of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples following his resurrection has many of the same elements as the Emmaus story: the risen Christ appears, the disciples do not recognize him, they are scolded for doubting, food is shared, and they respond in wonder and joy. Jesus’ greeting – “*Peace be with you*” – was a common greeting in Semitic cultures, but it also follows the pattern of Jesus’ instruction to his followers that “*whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’*” (10:5). But even though they had heard the witnesses of the women and the disciples from Emmaus, the disciples react in a manner typical of the appearance of angels: they were “*startled and terrified.*” Luke adds that they also thought that they were seeing a ghost; this sets up the need to clarify the nature of the resurrection and confirm its reality. After chastising them, asking “*why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*” (24:38), Luke introduces a new element into the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection appearances: the corporality of the risen Christ. Jesus’ offering his body for examination and eating fish in their presence constitute a dramatic double insistence:

- The Gospel teaches that Jesus died and that God raised him from the dead, and the hope of believers takes its shape from that central affirmation: “*the resurrection of Christ will not fit the old notion of immortality. God has acted in a unique way in raising Jesus.*” (Fred Craddock).

- The risen Christ who appears to the disciples is the same Jesus who died on the Cross at Golgotha. The wounds on his hands and feet and his eating fish in front of them verify that he is not an apparition but that he is indeed risen from the grave. *“Easter is forever joined to Good Friday, and to follow the risen Christ is to follow the one who bore the cross.”* (Craddock).

- The second part of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples serves to bring closure to the story by recapping major themes of the Gospel and to set the stage for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the work of the disciples as witnesses to the Gospel account of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus’ instruction is not new but rather stresses continuity between the words of the risen Christ and the historical Jesus. The Gospel is in continuity with what God has been doing and planning in the Hebrew Scriptures. Luke has reminded his readers of the consistent faithfulness of God; here the risen Christ opens the minds of his disciples to understand them: *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”* (24:44). The fulfillment of Scripture is tied to the resurrection in the church’s early proclamation:

- “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve.” – 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

The risen Lord reminds the disciples that he had told them these things while he was still with them (*“But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation.”* – 17:25). The passion predictions are related to the fulfillment of scripture (*“For I tell you, the scripture must be fulfilled in me”* – 22:37). It was necessary, in God’s providence, that the scriptures must be fulfilled in the way.

After the risen Christ connect his death and resurrection with the fulfillment of the stories of Scripture that the disciples had been told, Luke reports that Jesus *“opened their minds to understand the scriptures”* (24:45). The message of the Scriptures is not self-evident; one’s mind must be opened to it, and these teachings are rightly understood only in the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This is why Jesus often ordered his followers not to tell others about him before his death and resurrection, for only after this will they truly understand who he is as the Messiah of God.

- “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to

all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” – 24:46-48.

Luke gathers under the authority of Scripture not only the death and resurrection of Christ but also the mission to all nations (... *you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” – Acts 1:8). “Thus it is written” is the equivalent of saying, “it has been God’s plan all along.” The new is not new but is the old story properly interpreted and fulfilled in Jesus’ death and resurrection. “*The plan of God already set forth in Scripture contains a message and an offer that constitutes the charter of the Christian mission.*” (Craddock). The Holy Spirit has moved the church into areas in which it otherwise would not have gone and into activities in which it otherwise would not have engaged. Jesus’ call to the disciples to be “*witnesses of these things*” (24:48) develops in the course of the New Testament from the role of eyewitness, to one who can testify to the gospel, to one who dies for the sake of the gospel (*martyria*).

- “Jesus, the early church, and the stories of Israel are interwoven in this passage. Jesus connects his story as the suffering and resurrected Messiah to the Scriptures. He also ties the early church’s story to his story and the scriptures. By doing this, he emphasizes the truth of the resurrection and the importance of God’s plan. This revelation helps the disciples understand how God’s past, present, and future work together for salvation. As a result, the disciples can effectively spread the message as witnesses. This pivotal moment marks the story’s transition into the book of Acts.” – Michael Joseph Brown.”

In his resurrection appearance to both the disciples in Emmaus and those to whom he appeared in Jerusalem, the risen Christ connects the stories they had been passed on to them by their ancestors with the story that they will share as witnesses to the fulfillment of Scripture in the death and resurrection of Christ. As apostles, they will begin the mission of the Church to share “*the old, old story of Jesus and his love*” (ELW Hymn 661), a story that stretches back from Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection to the Old Testament, the Scriptures to which Jesus had opened the minds of his disciples. Having witnessed to the resurrection of Christ and hearing his teachings on the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures, they are now to be witnesses who will bear the testimony to the Gospel to all nations, so that “*in every nation everyone who believes in him and does what is right is acceptable to him*” (Acts 10:35).

- “The power of the resurrection is the power to plant the seeds of transformation. The hope of the resurrection is grounded in the experience of those first followers.

Closed minds can be opened. The potential is for a release in a prophetic way. The word of God calls us to peace rather than security.” – Nancy R. Blakely.

When my parents shared those beloved Bible stories with me from a Bible that I still cherish, they were doing far more than simply trying to get their stubborn child to fall asleep. They were passing on the “old, old stories” that had been shared with them by persons who opened the Scripture to them in fulfillment of the charge we receive when we bring our children to the waters of Holy Baptism: to *“place in their hands the holy scriptures and nurture them in faith and prayer, so that your children may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace”* (ELW Holy Baptisms). As the story of Jesus and his love was told to us, we are called to share this story with our children and with others for whom it will be a source of life and light. As the story was told to us, our call as the apostolic church is to tell the story to others, so that *“when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song, I’ll sing the old, old story that I have loved so long.”*

“Tell me a story” – so that I may also know the good news that brings life out of darkness and hope that conquers despair: that **Christ the Lord is risen, Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

Amen.