

Luke 24:36-53

Times of transition can be difficult for us and all human beings. Transitions can play with our emotions raising doubts and fears within us. In the gospel passages of recent weeks, we have heard these two words expressed or demonstrated many times. The doubts and fears of the disciples revolve around their search for proof. Jesus has been providing proof to them through his appearances; proof that it is indeed he: the resurrected Christ. Yet, some of the disciples continue to have doubts. Some of the disciples continue to have fears. And some of them continue to seek further proof to explain what happened to Jesus following his crucifixion.

During this "Time After Easter," we have heard some of the doubts that people had about the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection. We have heard about Jesus' resurrection appearances to the disciples, first in the evening without Thomas and then 8-days later with Thomas present. Last Sunday, Thomas was mentioned in Bishop Arend's sermon. Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had been resurrected until he could touch Jesus' hands where the nails had been and place his hand in Jesus' side. Once Thomas did these things, he believed that Jesus had been resurrected.

In our gospel passage for today, we continue to gather proof of Jesus' resurrection through another of Jesus' appearances. The disciples are **frightened** when they see Jesus. He shows them his **hands** and **feet**. They want to see the marks that so cruelly caused Jesus' death. He asks them for something to eat, and he eats in their presence, confirming that he is not a ghost. Through his actions, the disciples believe that the one who appears before them is truly the risen Jesus.

There is a "thread" regarding **hands** and **feet** that appears in the Gospel of Luke. Luke 4:11, references the angels' care for Jesus, stating, "On their **hands** they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your **foot** against a stone." The evil one tempts Jesus in the wilderness by using

these words. The passage emphasizes God's protection for Jesus (including when Jesus is crucified and his **hands** and **feet** are nailed to the cross. For although Jesus is bound to the cross, his crucifixion and death are necessary as they lead to Jesus' resurrection.) In Luke 7:38, a woman "... stood behind him (Jesus) at his **feet**, weeping, and began to bathe his **feet** with her tears. Then she continued kissing his **feet**..." Her actions are to anoint Jesus' feet prior to his death.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus uses his **hands** and **feet** to provide the disciples with proof that the "man" standing before them, is he. He is Jesus, even though he speaks to the disciples as one who has already been resurrected. Jesus says, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you..." (vs. 44) And Jesus assuages the disciples' doubts by providing them with living proof. Jesus says, "Look at my **hands** and **feet**, see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have **flesh** and **bones** as you see that I have. And when he had said this, he showed them his **hands** and **feet**..." (vs. 39-40)

Another "thread" that runs throughout the Gospel of Luke is that of angels and other holy persons (for example, Elijah and Moses at Jesus' transfiguration) who appear to humans. When they appear, the humans are afraid.

Angels, during their appearances, often begin their pronouncements with "Fear Not..." or "Do not be afraid," yet the person or persons spoken to are "terrified." For example, (in Luke 1:12), "When Zechariah saw him (an angel), he was **terrified**; and **fear** overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "**Do not be afraid**, Zechariah,..." (And to Mary in Luke 1:29) "But she was much perplexed by his (the angel's) words and pondered...". The angel said to her. "**Do not be afraid**, Mary..." (To the shepherds in Luke 2:9), "Then an angel of the Lord stood before them...and they were **terrified**. But the angel said to them, "**Do not be afraid**..." (When Jesus

raised the only son of the mother from the dead in Luke 7:16), the crowd responded, and “**Fear seized all of them...**” In Luke 24:4-5, at Jesus’ tomb, “...two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. [later described as angels, and] the women were **terrified...**”

In today’s passage, in Luke 24:37, when the disciples saw Jesus, they were “...startled and **terrified**, and thought they were seeing a ghost. He [Jesus] said to them, “Why are you **frightened** and why do **doubts** arise in your hearts?” For the disciples are full of fear-- fear of the unknown, fear of what their lives will be like without Jesus, and fear of this "ghost" who has appeared to them. The thought of someone rising from the dead, or a ghost appearing and talking to them, is so frightening and astounding that the disciples and other humans present cannot believe that it is happening! It is only after the disciples see Jesus, and Thomas touches Jesus’ **hands** and places his hand in Jesus’ side, that their fears subside and they believe.

Throughout the years, persons who could not witness these things raised questions about Jesus’ resurrection. While we have discussed several examples in recent weeks, today we explore one more resurrection question and the evidence surrounding it. Using information from the book, “The Case for Easter,” by Lee Strobel, we consider this additional proof related to Jesus' resurrection.

To Stroebel’s question, “Isn’t it true that there are no eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection? Gary Habermas, a noted scholar and theologian, provides the following response, “...[S]cience is about causes and effects. We don’t see dinosaurs; we study the fossils. We may not know how a disease originates, but we study its symptoms. Maybe nobody witnesses a crime, but police piece together the evidence after the fact.”

Yesterday, I read a news article that provides an example for Habermas' statement regarding scientific fact gathering. The article was about an archaeological discovery near the

Western Wall in Jerusalem (James Rogers, Fox News, May 22, 2020). A 1 centimeter stone stamp dating to a time between the middle of the 7th Century B.C., to the start of the 6th Century B.C., had been found. On the clay seal stamp were the words, "(Belonging) to Nathan-Melech, Servant of the King." The stone and its words provide historical proof of Nathan-Melech's existence, approximately 2,600 years ago. (There is a reference in 2 Kings 23:11 to Nathan-Melech, who served as an official in the royal court of King Josiah.) The stone would have been Nathan-Melech's personal stamp which at one time was attached to the top of his signet ring.

In another example, during this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic, we look to science (as Habermas suggests), as a means of studying diseases and their symptoms. Since no one knows exactly how the Coronavirus originated, researchers are attempting to breakdown the component parts of COVID-19 to determine its makeup. Some think it originated in a wild animal and was transferred from the animal to human beings. We do not know. But the scientists, researchers, doctors, and other health professionals are studying the virus' symptoms. While we cannot see the virus in people, we know that it exists, because of its far-reaching effects on the human body. And we understand that beyond those with visible symptoms, asymptomatic persons can still harbor the virus. There are no witnesses to describe how the virus originated, and at present no one knows for sure. Yet, through the symptoms, we have proof that the Coronavirus exists.

As we near the end of this "Time After Easter," we see the disciples moving away from doubt, fear, and the need for proof. They begin a time of transition. We hear in verses 44-49 of the disciples preparation for their next role. Jesus talks to them of his fulfilling what is written in the law, prophets, and the psalms. Jesus helps them to understand scripture. Jesus reminds them of the things that he foreshadowed during his time with them. And we hear the words that Jesus

spoke to the disciples to help them transition into their work after Jesus' ascension. Jesus states, "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. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

All is well! All is in place! This is a time of transition for the disciples. Jesus has described for them what their role will be: to be witnesses for God. They are to teach about repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the world. For God the Father will be sending them what the Father has promised. God will be sending them the Holy Spirit. And this is the time for the disciples to prepare for their work in the world, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

After the disciples' doubts and fears have been dispelled, and they are told by Jesus of their calling, they witness Jesus' ascension. Jesus, "lifting up his **hands**... blessed them." (vs. 50). Jesus ascended up into heaven to be with God the Father. He ascended, because Jesus had accomplished what he needed to accomplish on earth. He had done what God the Father had sent him to do. He had prepared the disciples. And now, Jesus was ascending to be at the right hand of the power of God. "And they (the disciples) worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God." (vs. 52-53)

As the disciples moved from doubt, fear, and their own search for proof, Jesus' actions solidified their belief in his resurrection. They were ready to begin God's work. They were ready to do what Jesus had taught them through his words and actions. They were ready for their time of preparation that would lead to Pentecost (which we will experience in God's word, next Sunday). We will hear once again, of the work of the one, Triune God. We will hear once again,

of God's grace poured out for the disciples and all Christian believers. We will hear once again, of God's love for all humanity. We will learn about the work of the Holy Spirit. We will experience what it means to have faith. And we will explore what it means to be servants of God. "God's work, our **hands**." Thanks be to God!