

April 26, 2015

TEXT: Luke 36b-48

TITLE: What are you looking at?

“What are you looking at?” You are heading for your seat in the cafeteria, but aren’t walking fast enough. You make eye contact with the girl whose jokes are making the whole room laugh, at the crowded table in the center of the room. You wonder if her jokes were about you.

The question says you have no right to be connected to those around you, to be an actor on the stage. And you start to question if you are simply on the outside looking in – a spectator of a world inhabited by beautiful and powerful people who aren’t anything like you. And you start to notice the other onlookers: Those who are too poor or too fat; Those whose skin is the wrong color, who are awful at sports. And you soon feel less alone.

“What are you looking at?” You go to the window and look over your spouse’s shoulder. There was a noise outside. You hold your breath as you look out in the night, not sure what you will see – hoping that you won’t see anything and can get back to sleep. Someone is walking down the street, and you catch a shadow under the streetlight. They’re walking away, not running. But they are unfamiliar. And it’s late. And you make sure the door is locked tight.

“What are you looking at?” You examine the foot of your four-year-old – the red and tender spot on her heel. You scoot her around in the chair so that her foot faces the window and you have more light. You develop a strategy for excising the splinter that is buried deep under taught skin: A Popsicle for her to suck on, some ice on her heel, gathering the needle and tweezers you will sterilize over the open flame of the gas range.

“What are you looking at?” You watch as bodies are pulled from under collapsed houses on the nightly news. You watch the report of another police officer’s arrest for the death of an African American man in police custody. You watch as crowds gather outside of a British hospital in hopes that a royal baby will be born. You watch footage of storm damage throughout the Midwest. You pray for the victims of the earthquake. You resolve to wear the pin that says “Black Lives Matter.” You vow not to get sucked in to baby-watch coverage as you write a check to PDA.

Our eyes have seen a lot. They’ve seen courage and fear, justice and corruption, altruism and greed, unity and diversity. They’ve seen things first hand, through the lens of our experience. They’ve seen what others have pointed out to us and have allowed us to explore new territory. For many of us our eyes serve as the first filter of information, the first shapers of reality. Our eyes school us to become experts on our observations – making quick judgments like when to cross the street, which line to get into in the grocery

store – but striving for more, hoping to learn which information we can trust and which we need to let go. Every day we bear witness to the world.

Historian Howard Zinn, writes of how his personal experiences shaped his perspective on history and ultimately compelled him to author his bestselling book *The People's History of the United States*. He writes of his participation in the civil rights movement, of protesting the war in Vietnam and how these grand engagements in human history impacted his perspective. He says:

But my partisanship was undoubtedly shaped even earlier, by my upbringing in a family of working-class immigrants in New York, by my three years as a shipyard worker, and by my Air Force duty as a bombardier in the European theater...in the Second World War. That was all before I went to college under the GI Bill of Rights and began to study history.

By the time I began teaching and writing, I had no illusions about “objectivity,” if that meant avoiding a point of view. I knew that a historian was forced to choose, out of an infinite number of facts, what to present, what to omit. And that decision inevitably would reflect, whether consciously or not, the interests of the historian.¹

He confesses how even this attempt to tell a more complete story of our nation's history – a story told, even, from the perspective of those who had been marginalized – left out important voices because of his own limited view. What we see informs what we know.

How we see things shapes our understanding.

Our text for this morning is another case study in how experience informs understanding. The disciples are gathered in the upper room, filled with fear and doubt. They have already heard that Jesus has risen and that he is on the move. They have already heard the stories of the two who greeted him on the road to Emmaus and who recognized Jesus when he broke bread for them then disappeared. But they struggle to believe what they haven't seen.

Into their doubt, Jesus emerges – stepping through walls with outstretched arms – that they might see for themselves that he is alive. At first sight, the disciples had no idea what they were looking at when they saw the risen Christ. As one commentator states: “dead stuff is supposed to stay dead.”² Was it a dream? A vision? Or was Jesus simply a ghost?

¹ Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States*. P 682.

² ??

Jesus then points out to them the wounds on his hands and his feet. He even asks for a piece of fish to eat and eats it as they watch. He is not an apparition. He is there. *In the flesh*. The body that was broken on the cross is now standing before them – different and yet the same. Barbara Brown Taylor writes:

Look he said to them afterwards, when the danger was past, *you can look at them now*. He wanted them to know that he had gone through the danger and not around it, so he told them to look – not at his face, not into his eyes – but at his hands and feet, which told the truth about what had happened to him, which were the only proof he had that he was who he said he was.³

The resurrected body of Christ matters. Luke wants for us to see that the risen Christ is not just spirit, but *flesh and bones*. See, for Luke, it is clear that BODIES MATTER. It's all through his story. From the sermon on the plain to the parable of the Good Samaritan, to the breaking of the bread in the upper room, Luke draws our concern over and over again back to the material – to the grumbling bellies of the hungry, the cold bodies of the homeless, the bruised bodies of the abused. And as a matter of call, Luke teaches that disciples must minister to the bodily needs of others, and faith must be as grounded in this life as it is on the life to come

Luke wants us to see that Christ's resurrection impacted the whole of Christ – spirit and body. He suggests to us that since the whole of Christ was raised from the dead, the whole of our selves- the whole of this world- has been redeemed by his death and resurrection. The resurrection isn't just for the afterlife, for eternity in heaven. The resurrection is for the here-and-now, and is a means of justice, hope and peace for this broken world.

We gather in this room today in the hopes that we might be counted among those who have witnessed the living Christ. We long to witness God's promises in action, to see for ourselves that the one who walked through walls can walk right through the walls we've constructed around our hearts. We long to be touched by the one whose hands are wounded, knowing that our own wounds will be healed by his amazing grace. We gather with hope that we might witness how God's revelation of love for us in Jesus Christ changes everything: it changes who we are; it changes how we act; it changes how we see the world.

The resurrection is hard to believe – that is true. And it is hard to explain without anything more than our own experience and the testimony of others to go on. We don't have a DNA analysis or surveillance camera footage to share. The evidence to which we testify as witnesses is the evidence of our transformed lives: our desire to help others, especially when it's inconvenient; our reconciled relationships; our experience of peace through the great storms of life.

³ Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Home Another Way*. P. 122-123.

But Luke reminds us that we don't have to have it all figured out. We just have to turn and look when he appears. We have to keep our eyes and hearts open so that we might chance an encounter with him, and in greeting him be forever changed.

What are you looking at? A man with wounded hands and wounded feet makes his way into a room with locked doors and windows and says: "don't be afraid."

What are you looking at? He holds out his hands – to show that heaven did in fact come to earth, and that heaven is still here.

He holds out his hands to show that redemption was won through suffering, that suffering can become the ground for new life – that his hands now hold the wounds of the world.

What are you looking at? He holds out his hands as if to say, "It's real. I'm real. Really."

He holds out his hands in invitation: to touch the flesh that still *is* – still the hands that broke bread, still the hands that pointed to Zacchaeus up in that tree, still the hands that rubbed mud on the eyes of the blind and washed them clean.

What are you looking at? Can't you tell? You may not understand it in one moment or one breath, but by seeing the wounded flesh of the risen Christ you are seeing, with your own eyes, the truth that humanness matters – that you matter, that others matter.

You are catching a glimpse, perhaps fleeting, of the promise that God's healing is for all of us, and for *all of us*. Bodies and souls, hopes and fears, wounds and wonders. God's acceptance is ours; God's love is ours.

God has redeemed our souls, our minds – our choices and attitudes, our beliefs and our arguments, our hopes and our desires, our limited understanding of God, ourselves, and this whole world.

God has redeemed our bodies - Our bodies that eat and caress; our bodies that trap cinders in skinned knees; our bodies that swing closed fists and birth babies; our bodies that eat chicken wings, that text our spouses, that cringe with a paper-cut and soak in the sun.

What are you looking at?

Open your eyes. Look around that you might see the one who brought God to humanity and carries humanity right back to God.

What are you looking at?

Open your heart. Look inside that you might see the one who made you *you*; the one that holds your past, who is with you in your present and goes before you into your future;

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Alleluia.