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Sermon 18 April 2021

Title: Look and Touch and Serve

- Good morning church! It is wonderful to be with you all on this third Sunday of the Easter season. We hope you've had a wonderful week and that you have been able to enjoy some of this beautiful springtime weather that God has been giving us, I know I am especially appreciating how long the days are getting—winter is behind us—even though it's still pretty chilly—but there is a freshness and a newness in the air.
- We are continuing to follow the lectionary during this Easter season—as we journey toward Pentecost and we find ourselves thinking about what happens after the crucifixion and the empty tomb—as the followers of Jesus struggle to make sense of what has happened to Jesus, and to themselves—and they come to understand what it means to be people who not only follow the teachings of Jesus, those things he taught them and the way he showed them that they should live before the crucifixion, but what it means to follow the risen Christ—to be people of the resurrection
- Our lectionary reading for this week is from the gospel of Luke, Chapter 24. Chapter 24 is, of course, the last chapter of Luke's gospel, and so we are at the end of the story. But remember that the part of the New testament that Luke writes consists of both the gospel of Luke AND the Book we call the Acts of the Apostles—so while chapter 24 is indeed the end of Luke's narrative about the life and ministry of Jesus, it is only the end of part one of a story that will continue when Luke tells us of the

miraculous change in the disciples that Pentecost will bring, and the way that the disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit to confront authority, to proclaim the gospel with boldness, to bring healing and wholeness to those who are suffering and in need, and to build and to lead a church that is united in heart and soul—even to face death with unflinching faith in the power of God and the truth of the Lordship of Jesus.

- But that ain't the situation yet-- back here in Chapter 24 of Luke's gospel, the disciples are still fearful and foolish--disoriented and doubtful and even oblivious to what is going on right before their eyes. They are confused about what has happened, they cannot conceive of what is happening, and they are concerned about what will happen in the future.
- Our reading for this week begins with verse 36. And if you have your Bible or your listening guide I invite you to follow along. Verse 36
- Luke writes: While they were talking about this—well, obviously we need to stop right there for a moment because we need to figure out who they are and what they're talking about, because we're 36 verses into the chapter already.
- And what has happened since verse 1 is that Luke has told us that some women went to the tomb where Jesus body had been laid, and two men in dazzling clothes ask them "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" and then tell them "He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." And the women DO remember, and they go and tell the apostles, but they don't believe the women—they think what they have to say is just an "idle tale." And there is a whole sermon that could be preached about how the

women understood what was happening but these men didn't, but suffice it to say that Peter runs to the tomb and looks in and only sees Jesus' grave clothes, and he goes home "amazed." Luke doesn't tell us, as John did, about any other disciple who may have run faster than Peter and won the race to the tomb.

- Then in the next scene, a couple of followers of Jesus are walking on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus appears to them but they don't recognise him—and Jesus gets them to tell him all about what's happened—and they say that they had THOUGHT that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel, but he got crucified and he's been dead for three days—in Jewish tradition, after three days the spirit leaves the body behind and death is irreversible and final—so there is no hope at this point—but then Jesus tells them in no uncertain terms that they are foolish. He says—now keep in mind that they still don't know who he is—he says: “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” And then Jesus interprets the scriptures about himself—beginning with Moses and all the prophets and then it looks like Jesus is going to leave them, but they ask him to stay and break bread with them—and when he does, their eyes are opened and they recognise who Jesus is—so they rush back to Jerusalem where they find the eleven disciples and those with them gathered together and they tell them how Jesus had been made known to them through the breaking of the bread.
- And that's where verse 36 finds us. In the room with these disciples talking about the empty tomb and what had happened on the road to Emmaus, and what Peter had seen, and what the women had testified to—and in the middle of all that discussion—all that trying to make sense of what had occurred over the past few

days—while they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them “Peace be with you.”

- Now you may be thinking “hey wait a minute, we heard this story last week in Pastor Tasha’s sermon!”
- And Chapter 24 of Luke’s gospel does indeed describe some similar events to John’s gospel’s 20th chapter—there’s the empty tomb and Jesus appearing to his followers but not being recognised—there’s Mary Magdalene at the tomb, though Luke specifies who else was with her, and now here we find the followers of Jesus—who haven’t fully understood how Jesus’ crucifixion made sense at all—gathered together and Jesus appears and says “Peace be with you.” You’ll no doubt notice some other similarities and differences as we go along, because even though Luke and John are telling essentially the same story, they are still different writers, and they place differing emphases on details of their narratives, and they use differing techniques to make the points they want to make. Part of what John was doing in his gospel was letting us know that Jesus is the eternal Word of God, who was present from the beginning and through whom the creative and redemptive power of God is at work, just as it was at the creation and in the Exodus—but Luke has a different story to tell, because Luke is telling us what happens in Jesus’ life and ministry with an eye toward what is going to happen in the life of the early church, as the disciples are led by the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God is built and the gospel proclaimed first in Jerusalem and then into all the earth.
- But as we’ve mentioned already, the disciples here in chapter 24 of Luke’s gospel are not the empowered, emboldened, steadfast and faithful disciples that we see in the Book of Acts—in fact they’re quite the opposite. Luke tells us that when Jesus

appears and says “Peace be with you,”—and that word that Luke uses is the same word Pastor Tasha told us about last week—*eirēne*—unity, harmony, calm, shalom—when Jesus says “Peace be with you, the disciples are anything but peaceful and harmonious—

- Luke tells us in verse 37 that
- 24:37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.
- The language that Luke uses there means that they were stricken with panic—that the disciples were so alarmed as to be detached from reality—behaving irrationally—the root of one of those words means to “fly” or to “flutter”—like when someone “flies off the handle” or “loses it”—basically Luke is telling us that the disciples were “freaking out”—the other word Luke uses there means to be filled with “phobia”—with fear—think of the reaction that a person who has a phobia of heights or of snakes has—they are irrationally paralysed or panicked.
- And Luke tells us why the disciples feel that way. It’s because they think they’re seeing a ghost—the word Luke uses is “*pneuma*”—spirit—the same word that’s used for the Holy Spirit, and for the soul that is distinct from our flesh in the Greek—and these disciples think they are having a paranormal, supernatural encounter—perhaps they think that maybe this is Jesus who is appearing before them, but remember, he’s been dead three days and Jewish tradition held that his spirit would be leaving him—and maybe it decided to visit them on its way to the afterlife
- And it’s here that Jesus asks them a question that, to be honest, I think is pretty funny—because Jesus knows what’s going on in their minds—he knows that they are freaked out—especially after the week they’ve had and the things they’ve seen, and the hours they must have spent thinking that they’d be next on the authorities’ hit

list—Jesus asks in verse 38: "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

- Now that is a rhetorical question if I've ever heard one. Jesus knows exactly why they are frightened—and he knows that they don't yet understand how the crucifixion and resurrection fit into God's redemptive history—they're not even sure yet THAT the resurrection happened—they're just beginning to wrap their minds around that—and so Jesus isn't really asking WHY in order to get an answer—he's asking "why" as a way of saying that there's no need to be frightened or panicked or doubtful, because he isn't just a ghost—or a disembodied spirit—a pneuma—he is flesh and bone.
- And it's at this point that Luke is about to spend the next 5 verses telling us about the way that Jesus shows the disciples—and us-- that he is not simply a ghost—pneuma—and so Jesus invites the disciples to do three things—first, Jesus invites them to look at his body-- in verse 39 Jesus says: Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself." But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't say just look and see—because there's more than meets the eye here—
- and so, secondly, he invites them to make contact with him, to lay their hands on his body— Jesus says "Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Jesus invites his followers to reach out and to touch him and see that he is made of flesh and bone—he has a body—he is not just an ethereal spirit—he is made of that stuff that Adam was made of—that stuff that we talk about when we "remember that we are but dust and to dust we shall return"—but that very stuff, that matter, that flesh has been glorified—it has not been destroyed or left behind or superseded—it has been transformed—it—his body—his flesh—

even now bearing the marks of mortality-- its wounds and its scars—that flesh has been transformed—that flesh has been resurrected

- “Touch me and see that this is what I am made of” Jesus says to his disciples—
- —and they do—and Luke begins to show us that their attitudes are changing—they are gradually moving away from a place of terror and panic and disbelief—Luke tells us in verse 41 that “while in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering”—they’re still not sure about what they’re witnessing but their terror, their panic, is turning to joy
- And that’s when Jesus makes a third request—he asks, “do you have anything to eat?” And they bring him some broiled fish and he takes it and eats it right there in front of them
- Why? Because if you don’t have a body, you don’t get hungry—you don’t need to be fed with real, tangible, material food—you don’t need to be nourished or need sustenance—eating is what creatures with bodies do—they rely on the provision of God’s creation to stay alive—one of the key differences between living bodies and corpses and spirits is that we have got to eat. We cannot detach ourselves from the rest of creation and be self-sustaining—we are dependent upon the provision of food and water the resources of the natural world—we cannot do without them—we are interconnected with them
- And Luke is careful to make sure that we understand what is going on here—taking 5 verses to give us the details of the way that Jesus demonstrates to his disciples that he is not a ghost—Luke tells us that with 3 requests-- look at my body, touch my body, and feed my body---Jesus has shown his disciples, and us, that he is not a ghost, not simply “pneuma” or spirit, but that he has a body—and not just a body

that has been revived, he is not just a corpse that has begun breathing again, no, he has been truly dead for 3 days and now lives-- resurrected, transformed—the same body that was crucified has been glorified—

- And Luke includes these details because this is a critical point—and it is a critical point here in the gospel of Luke because it establishes a central theological belief held by the church—a cornerstone of the faith—and not just a central theological point for the early church, but for Christians today as well—and that point is this-- Christians believe in the resurrection of the body.
- It's right there at the end of the Apostles' creed—I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.
- But what difference does that make? What does it mean that Christians affirm the resurrection of the body?
- Well, throughout the history of Christianity, every now and then people get to thinking that what following Jesus is all about, the most important thing, really the only thing that matters, is a person's soul, and the hereafter, where that soul is going to spend eternity. And while those are certainly important, the flip side of thinking that the only thing that matters is a person's soul and where it spends eternity is the idea that a person's body, and creation, and this life, don't really matter at all. The idea that "this ol' world" is evil and unclean and God-forsaken and irredeemable—what really matters is that you say some magic words and claim that Jesus is your personal Lord and saviour so you've got your ticket to heaven, and then all you need to do is wait for death or the second coming to sweep you into eternal bliss, and the rest of the world can go to hell and probably will.

- And when you get to thinking like this, it's easy to look at the world we live in and see things like hunger, and poverty, and disease, and injustice, and inequality, and exploitation and abuse and unrighteousness and loneliness and imprisonment and all kinds of meanness and say, well, that's just the way things are—what's important is that we get folks saved so they'll go to heaven and that assurance will help them make it through this fallen world. So we need to focus on that and not so much on feeding the hungry or healing the sick or rescuing the oppressed or visiting the imprisoned—even though Jesus did tell us to do those things, see he must have meant in a metaphorical sense—he was talking about spiritual hunger and spiritual bondage—all we really need to worry about is people's souls. And that is not the case.
- The name for this heresy—and it is a heresy-- is Gnosticism—that word starts with a G, by the way-- and it's connected to the Greek philosophy of Plato, who divided up the universe into the material world and the spiritual world, and he basically said that we were spirits in the material world—a band called the Police reminded us of that idea back in the 80s—but according to this philosophy we were trapped in this unclean, imperfect, bad material stuff and in order to be clean and perfect and good we really needed to find some way to get out of this mess.
- And that all sounds very logical and rational and really sort of like common sense until you start to think about the fact that Christians believe that in the beginning, when all things were made through the eternal Word (that's Jesus by the way), God looked at creation and called it “good.” When we hear Jesus tell us that we ought to pray that God's will would be done “on earth as it is in heaven.” When we read that Jesus said in Luke chapter 6—Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and don't do what I

say? Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, proclaim the good news of the gospel, because as you do unto the least of these you've done it unto me, as Jesus tells us in Matthew's gospel.

- When we as Christians affirm the resurrection of the body we are saying that this life, right now, this world and the flesh and bone bodies in it MATTER. They mean something. We are saying that eternal life is not something that begins after we die, it's something that begins right now, in this life, in this world where we are called to bring redemption and transformation and freedom and to be the means through which God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. We believe in the resurrection of the body.
- And so we see here in Luke's gospel that Jesus' calls his followers not just to look and to see, but to touch—to make contact. The word that Luke uses there doesn't mean just to gently press like a fingertip on a hot stove, no it means to grab a hold of, to feel, it refers to the way a person might grope about in the dark when they're trying to find their way. And that's what Jesus invites his followers to do, not just in the gospel of Luke, but today as well.
- And Jesus' invitation in Luke's gospel isn't just to an individual like it is to Thomas in John's gospel—because Luke is looking toward the church in the book of Acts—and so when Jesus says "Touch and see," he's using the second-person plural form of the verbs for "touch" and "see"—they refer to "you" plural, all of you—and this is one of those times when the fact that in English the second-person singular pronoun and the second person plural pronoun are the same doesn't really help much, because if I tell you that Jesus is saying "you touch me" when he's speaking to one person but I also say He's saying "you touch me" when he's speaking to a group—you don't hear

the difference—and this is why if I were translating this passage—and I suppose that I am—I would say that what Jesus says here is “Y’all—that’s the Southern second-person plural pronoun—Y’all touch me and see”—“All y’all grab ahold and see. See what has happened, see what is happening, and see what you are called to be and to do.”

- As soon as Jesus has told his followers “y’all grab ahold and see,”--he asks them to feed him—Jesus says to his disciples “feed me”
- The one who fed the 5000 here asks his disciples to feed him. But if we think back to the time when that crowd was fed, that’s in Luke 9, we may recall that when the disciples told Jesus that he should send the crowds away because they were hungry—Jesus tells them “You give them something to eat.” And now this same Jesus asks to be fed—Jesus is calling his disciples to practice what they have been learning throughout the gospel—that they are called not to escape or to be rescued from this world and its hardships and its needs—but to serve—to meet those needs
- And it’s at that moment that Jesus reminds them of all that he has said to them and how he is the fulfilment of the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms—and he opens their minds to understand what has happened and what is happening and what will happen—not through logic and reason or argument—but through an experience with the resurrected Jesus—because they have seen and touched and served the risen Lord.
- The disciples have seen, the disciples have touched, the disciples have served the Lord, and their minds have been opened to understand what has been happening not just in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, but in God’s salvific activity

throughout history—and now Jesus reminds them that they are called to be a part of it.

- In verse 46 we read that Jesus says to them: “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.”
- Here Luke points us to what is to come in the Book of Acts, as the people of the risen Christ, the people of the resurrection, carry the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name not just in Jerusalem but to all the world. “You are witnesses of these things,” Jesus says, and you are called to share them with the world.
- And here the things that Jesus taught before his death become joined with a new understanding of what has happened in the crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples have seen Jesus in the flesh, they have made contact with Jesus and they have fed Jesus and now they are called not only to be the hands and feet of Jesus for the world, to be the body of Christ that the world may also see and understand, but they’re called also to see Jesus in others, in the least of these, and to make contact with them, and to serve them, meeting their needs-- as you have done it unto Me.
- Followers of Christ are called to be Jesus for others and to see Jesus in others, so that it’s all Jesus—so that as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, so that God may be all in all.
- These three requests that Jesus made to his disciples still challenge us today—first, Jesus calls us to look and see who he is, to see that he is risen, that He is who He said He was—secondly he calls to the church, “all y’all grab ahold of me—make contact—

touch and see—and finally he calls us to serve him—“Feed me” he asks us--
whenever we SEE Him hungry or thirsty or naked or lonely or imprisoned, he calls us
to MAKE CONTACT and to SERVE—because we are witnesses to what we have
experienced and we are called to carry the gospel out beyond this place where we
are and out into the whole world—proclaiming the good news that transforms
situations and brings new life and healing and wholeness here and now in this life as
well as in the world to come—we pray that the Kingdom comes, that God’s will is
done on earth as it is in Heaven—we are people of the risen Christ and we believe in
the resurrection of the body.