

April 15, 2018 3rd Sunday after Easter

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Acts 3:12-19, Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48

Ideas from Karoline Lewis in Working Preacher for this date. Washington Post Weekly, April 8, 2018, article called 'Yes, I am Rosa,' She would say to herself. 'Yes, I fell lonely. Yes, I'm in Sanctuary.' By Stephanie McCrummen, pages 12-15.
Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians, by Austen Hartke, page 2.

Grace and peace, Beloved of Christ, witnesses, each one of you. Amen.

Speaking at an event once, writer and poet Maya Angelou described waiting for an airplane and being spotted by someone eager to meet her and talk.

The young woman bounded up to Maya Angelou and exclaimed, "I'm a Christian, too."

To which Maya Angelou, in her wisdom, in her honesty, in her humility, asked,

"Oh, honey, you're already there? It's going to take me a life time!"

It's going to take me a life time.

There is a lovely, wise, honest echo going on in our gospels these Sundays.

If you read the last chapter or two of most of them, you can hear it.

In Luke there was the first resurrection story—it's one we hear some years on Easter Sunday:

Pretty typical, the women at the empty tomb, and the rest of the disciples wondering if their witness may just be another idle tale.

Then, a verse later, another resurrection story, one of my all time favorites, the road to Emmaus, where Jesus walks along with them in their grief and seemingly broken hopes

And then, right on its tail, another resurrection story, the Gospel we hear today:

Peace be with you, look at my hands, look at my feet, Jesus says, touch them.

John's gospel has a similar echo.

There's that Easter morning resurrection story, Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...

And then there's the echo, the story Allie Jensen from Lutheran Campus Ministry preached last Sunday:

The story of Thomas, sometimes we call him, doubting Thomas.

Oh, we know you well, Thomas, very well.

There is an echo in the gospel.

In their grief, in their pain, they need to experience it not just once, but again.

In their disbelief, in their joy, in their wonder, Jesus comes to them again.

In their struggle, in *our* struggle, Jesus meets us again.

Peace be with you, echoes Jesus' promise, through the stories, through the history, our whole life long:
peace be with you.

Sometimes when I'm visiting with folks who are interested in joining the church, they say, *you say*,
something like,

"If you only knew what I believe,

if you only knew what I don't believe, you wouldn't want me in this congregation."

Oh, for the number of times we've wondered just that.

Dear friends, Maya Angelou spoke truth when she mused, "It's going to take me a life time."

Apparently absorbing these resurrection promises didn't happen in one moment at the tomb for the
disciples, and it doesn't often happen that way for us.

It's going to take a life time.

And that's good news, we don't need to have it all figured out.

We don't need to force it.

We don't need to fake it.

We can hold onto the complicated situations playing out in our world, I'm thinking of today of Syria,

and we can hold onto the real stuff in our lives,

and we can hold onto our curiosity and our questions,

and God's resurrection promises will continue to meet us right where we are: Peace be with you.

Where do we need this peace today?

Where do you need this peace?

Where does our world need it?

I mean it, that's a real question. In a word or two, where do we need Jesus' peace today? _____

Where are you seeing the gift of Jesus' peace? Where are you finding this peace? _____

One of the things I love about today's Gospel is the way Luke reminds us that Jesus brings his body.

Resurrection stories by nature so often get spiritualized, sort of lofty: don't hold onto me, Jesus tells Mary
Magdalene in one of them.

But in this very real way, in today's story, Luke intentionally reminds us of Jesus' body.

His belly rumbling, his hunger, his need for food...and they give him fish which he eats.

This is an aside, but we could so easily be sharing fish in the sacrament of holy communion, have you ever thought about that?

That would be a whole lot more difficult for the altar guild!

And Jesus then Jesus says, Look at my hands, my feet, see, it's me.

Touch me—I'm not a ghost, see my wounds, my scars.

What scars are you bringing with you today? Physical scars? Spiritual scars?

As they've healed, how have you experienced new life?

I had my unexpected appendix surgery about 3 ½ weeks ago now.

I've got some physical scars that are healing pretty well, thank you.

But what I've really been moved by is the way that experience, like happens for so many of us, affirmed my sense of the village, affirmed it, in a new-life sort of way.

Perhaps I needed that reminder more than I knew

When we let it, when we're vulnerable by choice or absolute sheer need, the village holds us.

Food to eat, a ride to the hospital, caring adults who make sure our kids were loved, plenty of prayers.

I can't predict the future, I can't control what will come next, our scars are certainly witness to that.

But what I do know, is that God will care for us.

That God meets us in our pain, and that the village will hold us, will carry us.

On the bus this morning, in the snow, I began reading Austen Hartke's new book called Transforming, about the Bible and the lives of transgender folks.

Writing about the biblical stories from which he learned his own truth, Austen wrote,

“I learned from Jesus, who after his resurrection chose to show his body to the disciples
—a body that was scarred and transformed, and yet still his own.”

With our scars comes new life.

Today's Gospel reading concludes, “You are witnesses of these things.”

Did you hear that? You are witnesses.

You almost got an entire sermon about being witnesses, but let me simply remind you that it doesn't say,
if we feel like it,
or when we've gotten brave enough,
or even sometime in the future we *will be* witnesses.

It says, You are witnesses. **We are witnesses.**

One last story as the resurrection continues to echo.

I read this week a piece in the Washington Post about a woman named Rosa Sabido.

For 30 years Rosa lived primarily in the US, and now for 257 days she has lived in the tiny Methodist

Church in Mancos, Colorado as the gears of the immigration process grind slowly, painfully slowly. There's powerful witnessing going on in her story.

There's Rosa's witness as exhausted she finds the courage to affirm again her truth, her identity,

“Yes, I'm Rosa?... ‘Yes, I feel lonely. Yes, I'm in sanctuary.’”

And there's the congregation's witness, rising up to Rosa's need, “standing with compassion,” they called it.

Isn't this how it often is?

We each have our own vantage, our own witness to the promise of new life.

Sometimes it's to garner our courage and take the next step claiming our identity, “Yes, I am Rosa.”

Sometimes it's to stand with compassion when tensions reign and Jesus calls us to something more.

Often it is one more time when the resurrection's new life is echoing, again, and again and again.

Thank God that Jesus keeps showing up, for it takes a life time.

It takes a life time, and that is Good News.

Amen.