

Third Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2009
St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Grand Island, NY
Luke 24: 36b-48
Acts 3: 12-19 (20-21)

“Touch Me and See”
by
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What a difference fifty days make!

The events of that first Easter day represent a first hand experience of Jesus.

“Touch me and see” is a first hand experience.

The events following that first Pentecost day represent a second hand experience of Jesus.

“Repent and turn to God” is a second hand experience.

Fifty days separate them.

Both result in an experience of Jesus and his saving presence!

Both involve “touch me and see” as well as “repent and turn to God.”

Both require an action and a response...a reaching out and a receiving in...a face to face encounter and an intimate embracing.

One is first hand. The other is second hand.

(Luke 24:1-35)

Before the events of today’s Gospel text, we will remember that earlier in the day, women had come to the tomb to apply spices to the body. They faced an empty tomb and the figure of two men in “dazzling clothes” who asked them: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

We will remember that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women went and told the apostles...Peter himself went to the tomb to verify reports that it was empty.

We will remember that the same day, two apostles traveling on the road to Emmaus experienced a phantom figure who “interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” We will also recall that these two invited this phantom figure to eat with them; where upon “he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.” Then, the Bible says, “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”

We will remember that these two immediately got up from dinner, returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven disciples and their companions and reported to them what had transpired...“how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

(Luke 24:36-48)

While these two Emmaus road travelers reported to the disciples in Jerusalem the things that had transpired, lo and behold, Jesus appears and stands right in the center of them. “Peace be with you,” he says. Seeing that they are frightened, Jesus asks them: “Why do doubts arise in your heart? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.” **Touch me and see.**

So they did. In classic first hand ways, the disciples experienced Jesus. They touched him and they “saw.” Their “touch” involved physical touching. Their “touch” involved his eating broiled fish in their midst. Their “touch” involved his opening their minds to understand the scriptures which read:

“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.”

Their “touch” included Jesus finishing with them saying:

“You are witnesses of these things!”

First hand witnesses, I may add.

The point I want to make is that these apostles are first hand witnesses and they will be forever first hand witnesses. That means that everyone subsequent to them will be second hand witnesses!

Second hand does not mean “second class.” But it does mean second hand, not first hand. That is where the problem comes in. The second hand witness will always have to stand on the shoulders of the first hand witnesses. The second hand witness will always be dependent on the first hand witness to gain even a semblance of a first hand experience.

Yet, the need for a primary experience of Jesus...his life...his suffering...his rising...his empowering...

The need to experience Jesus will be the same for people of every time and place. This need will never go away. The need will never go away but the way to have this primary experience will evolve...will take on different shapes...and over time morph into a variety of modes.

“Touch me and see” will become “repent and turn to God.”

Fast forward fifty days.

(Acts 3:1-11)

The day of Pentecost has occurred. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon countless people gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. The Apostle Peter has addressed the crowds with inspired speech. A familiar feature at one of the Jerusalem gates is a man

lame from birth begging for alms to support himself. (He had long since given up on being cured.) Peter and John come by, the man cries out for a donation. Expecting to receive something from Peter and John, he is greeted with: "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!" The man stands up, begins to walk around (healed), and goes ecstatic with joy, praising God for this miracle. The bystanders are amazed at this "sign and wonder" performed by Peter and they too are filled with "wonder and amazement."

The word spreads, a larger crowd than before gathers outside Solomon's Portico utterly astonished. Peter begins to address this crowd:

(Acts 3:12-19, 20-21)

Notice: Peter is the person who has had a first hand experience of Jesus. The lame man had had a second hand experience of Jesus. Now the crowd, if they are to experience anything of Jesus, will themselves, like the lame man, have to experience him second hand!

Peter, addressing the crowd, begins by asserting that the lame man was healed by their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who had glorified Jesus and raised him from the dead. Yet, you, the people, "rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer given to you. You killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead."

Next Peter lifts up the role of faith. He explains to the crowd that it was by faith in Jesus' name that the lame man had been made well. "The faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you."

Then Peter moves in for the point of it all:

"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers...**Repent therefore, and turn to God.**"

Repent: turn your back on, reject your old ways, die to your old self. Turn to God: face god ward, reverse your natural tendencies and trust God, come in faith to Him so that

- a. your sins may be wiped out (v.19)
- b. times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord (v.20)
- c. He may send the Messiah, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. (v.21)

(Acts 4:1-4)

The outcome of Peter's preaching that day was that

- a. he got from the religious establishment opposition, push back and disbelief; (vv.1-3)
- b. He got from 5000 belief! (v.4)

That day 5000 second hand onlookers became first hand believers and followers of Jesus. Using a second hand method (preaching) Peter had brought them into a first hand experience (faith) of Jesus.

For them, through Peter's preaching, Jesus' "**Touch me and see**" invitation (Luke 24:39) had become theirs through **repentance and turning to God**.

They could say "I too have touched him! I too have seen Jesus!"

To this both those that experienced Jesus first hand and those that experienced Jesus second hand have become witnesses for all succeeding generations.

To us, who are second hand recipients, they say, in behalf of the one who invited "touch me and see," **repent and turn to the Lord**

Reach out and receive Him...encounter Him and embrace Him

so that

your sins be wiped out

so that

times of refreshing may come to you from the presence of the Lord

so that

He may send the Messiah for the universal restoration.

[PRAYER]