

**Witnesses of These Things
Luke 24: 36b-48
Ann Hatfield**

Disbelief, joy, and wonder. During this season of Eastertide, the post-Easter stories evoke these intertwined emotions. This happens early on Easter morning, when Mary Magdalene discovers an empty tomb. It occurs again – as Jon preached last week – when Thomas’s expressions of faith and doubt are followed by his bold and joyful proclamation: “My Lord and my God!” Whenever the risen Christ encounters his disciples, disbelief, joy, and wonder often arise.

I imagine we also might experience these emotions simultaneously when we emerge from the pandemic. After so many months of lockdown and maintaining COVID protocols, we may feel some disbelief and skepticism. Is it really over? Are we truly safe now?

And, when the end of safety precautions is finally on the horizon, just imagine the joyful possibilities! The sanctuary filled with worshippers; the choir loft resounding with singers; the joyful laughter of children in pews; passing the peace by actually shaking hands.....and simply hugging those we know and love. Halleluiah! Thanks be to God! It cannot come soon enough!

Entangled with our disbelief and joy may be curiosity and wonder. What does life look like now? How do we carry on? As the existential threat of the pandemic dissipates, we may indeed find ourselves joyfully disbelieving the present state of affairs, while also wondering what exactly the future holds.

At the start of today’s passage, the disciples are in an unbearable situation. Just days ago, they watched in horror, as Jesus – their leader, teacher, and friend – was brutally crucified. Obviously, that should have been the end of the story. So understandably, the disciples are startled and terrified, when Jesus appears among them, saying, “Peace be with you.”

Perhaps not getting the welcome he expected, Jesus follows this initial greeting with questions: “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” With minds and hearts racing, the disciples must be pondering how on earth to begin answering. So much has happened. Where to even start???

Still not getting a response, Jesus invites his friends to look at his hands and feet – see the crucifixion scars. Touch my body – feel that I am not a ghost or hallucination. Sensing the disciples still need more verification, Jesus asks, “Have you anything here to eat?”

It reminds me of when my sons were teenagers, and they were desperate to know, “Mom, what’s for dinner?”

Jesus is giving the disciples tangible proof. The risen Christ is real – able to be touched and able to eat. The Lord is alive, and he has come to be present with them in a whole new way.

Like the first disciples at the beginning of today’s passage, fear may be holding us captive. There are so many places where the pandemic has shattered our lives and left broken remnants scattered about. Some have lost beloved family members and friends to this disease. Many who have had the coronavirus may never fully recover from all the symptoms of this illness. Others struggle with depression, job loss, loneliness, and anxiety.

Reflecting on the sorrow and brokenness endured throughout the pandemic, I am reminded of the Japanese art of Kintsugi. This is the art of repairing broken pottery with precious metals. In this photograph, you can see an example.



The broken bowl is restored to wholeness and function. However, instead of hiding or masking the fractures, the cracks are highlighted with gold, silver, or platinum. When the Japanese artists mend broken objects, they accentuate the damage by visibly filling the cracks. The gold veins emphasize a history of

traumatic destruction, along with the beauty of redemption and new life.¹

When we emerge from the pandemic, we will carry lasting scars from this experience with us – in our bodies. However, while suffering may be part of our journey, it is not the whole story.

Thankfully, today’s passage does not have the last word for the disciples either. They are not left to live forever fearfully locked in an upper room. Instead, Jesus sends them out into the world, commissioning them to be witnesses of these things – of all they have seen and heard; and everything they are beginning to understand about these appearances of their risen Lord.

Just when we think the plagues of disease, hunger, gun violence, war, climate change, and racism have the final word, the risen Christ also comes and stands among us – sharing his peace. The good news of Easter is that Christ’s loving presence continues to bring healing to our broken world. This promise is at the heart of our Christian faith. Our relationship with God does not depend upon our locating and finding God. Rather, our relationship with God rests soundly upon God, who finds us – no matter where we are – and comes to stand with you and me.²

Author and theologian Joan Chittister writes, “Faith is the willingness to believe that, however dark the present, God’s future means only good for us.”³

As we commemorate and celebrate Earth Day this week, we are reminded the good news of God’s future is not just for humanity. It also extends to creation, which sadly carries the scars of a long history of destruction, and also is in need of healing and redemption.

In the midst of the chaos and confusion of this past year, the resurrection of Jesus encourages you and me to HOPE again. We all carry scars – visible and invisible – but the broken pieces and places of life are not the end of the story. Pain and brokenness do not have the last word, because God continues the work of picking up the pieces to repair, restore, and redeem them.

The extravagant grace of God is like the precious gold in the art of Kintsugi repair. By God’s grace, our shards of doubt and fragments of despair are transformed – making us beautifully whole, even with our scars. That is the good news of Easter – healing, redemption, and new life – by the grace of God!

Friends, along with those first disciples, Jesus invites us to be witnesses of the power of resurrection. Let us go out this day – and everyday – living hopeful lives, trusting God with our future, and always proclaiming the joy and wonder of our faith: Christ is alive! The Lord is risen! Alleluia!

Amen.

¹ Julie Polter, *Sojourners*, “God Is in the Making: Artist Makoto Fujimura on Loving What Is Broken and the Holy Work of Repair,” February 2021, p. 24-27

² William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, “Jesus Among Us,” April 19, 2015, p. 15

³ Joan Chittister, *Uncommon Gratitude: Alleluia For All That Is*, 2010, p. 179.