

# Sermon: Easter 3

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Year B  
Acts 3:12-19  
Psalm 4  
1 John 3:1-7  
Luke 24:36b-48

When I was thirty-seven years old... not too long after I converted to Christianity... I was living in western Ohio... my family thought... that maybe I converted... because I was living in a largely non-Jewish part of the country... and that it was little more than... "a practical accommodation"... that it was a way of blending in... of avoiding the anti-Jewish sentiment alluded to in today's reading from Acts... and there would have been reason to do so... as Professor Wil Gaffney writes... Christian anti-Judaism has taken many forms... blaming the Jews for killing Jesus... denigrating Judaism as a legalistic works-based religion... claiming that Christians have replaced Jews in God's favor... diminishing or erasing Jesus' Jewish identity... and characterizing Jesus' ministry and message as independent from and oppositional to first-century Judaism...

Some of these notions are rooted in Christian scriptures... but all of them have been intensified through anti-Jewish preaching... teaching... and theological discourse... which has resulted in vandalism... theft... disenfranchisement... and the persecution of Jews... "perpetrated in Christian lands by Christian hands"... but they found one of their most deadly expressions in Nazi Germany...

This past Wednesday was *Yom HaShoah*... Holocaust Remembrance Day... it's listed on the Lutheran *Ordo Kalendar*... and at Wednesday morning's Eucharist... I read a few paragraphs from my adopted aunt's autobiography... Waiting to Mourn... about how her parents were the victims of this Nazi hatred... how she and her parents fled from Berlin to Brussels... but how... after the Nazis invaded Belgium... her father was still taken off the street and was murdered in a concentration camp... how she alone... because she was born in America... was able to come live with my grandfather... her father's cousin... and how her mother died later by suicide... due to grief...

And so what's ironic... is that last week's Gospel of John... says that on Easter day... *the doors of the house where the disciples had met... were locked... for fear of the Jews...* the text implies that Jews were oppressing Christians... but you see... John's Gospel was written about 90 CE... and the tension at that time... was projected into this text... this tension between the Followers of the Way and their Jewish brethren... arose from the destruction of the Temple... and a desire to not be associated with the Jewish people who had lost favor with Rome... the destruction of the Temple was fresh and painful... like an open wound... and after about only twenty years... there was still a residual *fear of the Romans...* too... so there was plenty of fear... suspicion... and tension... to go around...

Today's Gospel describes more fear... even though Jesus offered God's Peace to them... the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost and were terrified... so Jesus showed them his hands... and his feet... and asked for something to eat... because ghosts don't eat... right... but in last week's Gospel... Jesus invited Thomas to put his hand into open wounds... but there's no indication in today's text what the resurrected Jesus' hands and feet look like... were there still open wounds... were there only scars... or was there no sign of the crucifixion at all... we don't know for certain... but there are questions about what it means to be healed without being healed... and whether woundedness... keeps us from union with God...

Just a few verses before today's story... is the Road to Emmaus story... and you know... on Easter day... Cleopas and his companion are walking with and talking to Jesus... but they don't know it's Jesus... and they say it's getting late... come in with us for the night... and let's sit at table... but it was in the breaking of the bread... that Jesus was known to them... and as soon as Jesus vanished from their sight... they asked... *Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, and while he was opening the scriptures to us?*

And Jesus does the same thing a little bit later with the disciples when he said... *Everything written about me in the law of Moses... the prophets... and the psalms must be fulfilled... then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures...* as John Shea writes... Jesus explains to the disciples how the promises of the Law and the Prophets... and the experience of God in the Psalms... have come to completion in him... God's plan for the salvation of the world has been revealed and inaugurated... it must go out to all people... and of course... it begins right where they are... in Jerusalem... they are witnesses who now know the story... and must live out the reality...

When I was thirty-seven years old... when I first began to think that there might be a place for me in the Episcopal Church... with my progressive theology... and really... pretty varied life experiences... and my own wounds... some of which lay hidden and were yet to be revealed... I felt the way some of those first-century Jewish Christians may have felt... a welcome into something more inclusive... an invitation into something bigger than me... and so it just didn't seem to matter that I hadn't "grown up" in church... that I could... like Nicodemus... be born again into a new identity while retaining the old one... and I wrote a letter to my parents which said in part... *that to reject my past... would be to reject a part of myself... that my goal was wholeness... not fragmentation...*

And so at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Greenville, Ohio... when I didn't understand anything about atonement theology... didn't know about perichoresis... even before I was baptized... and without asking permission... I just got up from that pew... and came to Table with everyone else... to be fed... but I didn't want just bread and wine... I didn't want to be fed just with the underlying substances of Jesus' body and blood... I wanted the Peace which Jesus offered... I wanted the Ground of Being... the Source of All Things... to be established within me... I wanted to be fed with eternity and infinity... to be fed with timelessness itself...

But it is well to remember... as Peter Marty wrote... from the earliest story of God molding people out of dirt... to the one where Jesus breaks bread one final time before his death... God revels in physicality... this should remind us... among other things... not to intellectualize the faith... for all of our fastidiousness in dissecting theological propositions... memorizing Bible verses... and sharing truth claims... we'd do well to remember how involved our bodies are... in giving shape to our faith practices...

But as we look around in our country and the world... we see people who want bread and wine... but not their underlying substances... people who want the peace that comes from air strikes... but not the Peace which passes understanding... people who stake claims to ground... but not to the Ground of Being... people who want to own many things... but not the Source of All Things...

Unfortunately... there are people who believe that any kind of woundedness... any kind of imperfection... makes us unworthy of all these things... and paradoxically... some of these people also reject our ability to use this connectedness to God... to effect transformation in the here and now... they want to just wait for salvation in the hereafter... that's why they seek honor... and avoid shame... at almost any cost... but it is by owning our woundedness... it is by the wounds we carry... and by being grafted on to the Body of Christ... that we are made real... and whole... and can work together to effect change... and we are given the same charge as the disciples... to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins... in his name... to all nations... not so much maybe... by what we say... but certainly by what we do...

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