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Acts 3: 12 – 19
1 John 3: 1 – 7

Ps. 4
Luke 24: 36b – 48

Fred Smith is a ruminator. He listens carefully, and then ponders what he is hearing. Much like Thomas of last week's Gospel from John, Fred takes things apart in his heart and mind, studies them, and then seeks to reassemble them in a way that makes sense for him. So, after last week's service, Fred came up to me to ask me a couple of questions:

- 'Why is it that the disciples can't figure out that this is Jesus – why don't they recognize him? Why would God do that?'
- And secondly, why does the resurrected Jesus still have nail holes in his hands and feet? Is it just to help prove to the disciples who he is?

Isn't it fortunate that today's Gospel, this time from Luke, gives us another opportunity to revisit these questions?!

Let's start with the issue of there being something different about the resurrected Jesus which – in every one of the post-resurrection stories – inhibits his disciples from recognizing him. Today's story from Luke follows right on the heels of the story of the two disciples walking to Emmaus. As soon as Jesus had disappeared from breaking the bread at their kitchen table, those two had hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what they had just experienced. And so now, they are in the room with everyone else when suddenly, Jesus is among them. Despite the report from the women who went to the tomb that morning and found it empty, and despite the testimony of these two from Emmaus, the disciples are still somehow unable to recognize Jesus immediately.

All of the evangelists, but especially Luke and John, make it abundantly clear that there is something different about the resurrected Jesus. In every story about Jesus after his resurrection, there is a problem recognizing him. The evangelists never explain exactly what's different, but somehow, Jesus is. The evangelists are trying to tell us that something is going on here. And it is something pretty important. Because, while the Gospel writers are short on the details of exactly *how* Jesus is different, they are very clear – and want us to be very clear – that it is indeed Jesus who has risen from the dead.

Somehow, some way, Jesus is a new creation. What he's *not* is a collective delusion, or a ghost that you can sort of see through, or a mirage, or a hologram, or even a magic trick. Because if he was, he wouldn't have scars and the disciples would not be able to reach out and touch him, or watch him eat a piece of fish. Jesus has a body – a body that walks and talks and sits and eats. But it is also somehow different from ours, because he isn't instantly recognizable. Because he can appear and disappear at will, even passing through locked doors and walls. It's the same Jesus. And yet at the same time, he's different. Is it simply the story of a caterpillar turned butterfly, or is there more to it?

What is it that we can take away from having a Jesus who is at once both unrecognizable and familiar? It tells us that Jesus can be anywhere - and really, everywhere. It tells us that we should be looking for Jesus to break bread with us unannounced, and that we should be listening for Jesus to call our name. Those with eyes to see and ears to hear, as Jesus says so many times. But the other part of the story, the part when Jesus *is* recognized, is just as important. Because it means that God-with-us, Emmanuel, the Word made Flesh, doesn't forget what it means to be human, to be one of us. Jesus doesn't shed his flesh and blood, like a snake shedding its skin. Jesus still is one of us. Which speaks

volumes about humanity and the material world. It speaks to the redemption of the entire created order. It says that we won't be cast off, but rather made new.

So then, what about the nail holes that Jesus' resurrected body bears? Jesus has suddenly appeared among the disciples, including the two from Emmaus and called out, "Peace be with you!" which inspires anything but peace in them. They are "startled and terrified." Jesus, noticing that their faces look as if they are seeing a ghost, asks them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet and see that it is really me!" What a strange thing to say. If you want to make sure it's really me, look at my hands and my feet.

Most of us do not look at someone else's hands and feet in order to identify them. We just don't. We look at someone's face. Or perhaps if we're at a distance, the way they stand or walk. Their mannerisms. But here the disciples all are, staring at this oh-so-familiar face, listening to the oh-so-familiar voice and it is just not sinking in because it is too far out of their realm of experience.

So, Jesus redirects their attention to his appendages that are now scarred with the wounds of his death. These are the hands, strong and calloused from years of working as a carpenter and builder. These are the hands that have smeared mud on the eyes of a blind man and healed him. These are the hands that have blessed and broken a few loafs of bread and some fish and fed thousands. These are the hands that took the lifeless hand of a little girl on her deathbed and lifted her back to life. These are the hands that didn't hesitate to reach out and touch countless lepers and people with other diseases and make them well. These are the hands that pointed and gestured and helped describe all the things that he had taught them. These are the hands that lifted up the bread and then the wine at the last meal he shared with them.

And the feet! These are the feet that trod all those miles, from village to village, to bring the Good News. These are the feet that were anointed with the tears and with the priceless ointment of an unnamed woman. These are the feet that walked into graveyards with demoniacs, by wells with people thirsty for living water, through fields ripe for the harvest, on the hard stone pavers of the Temple floor, into the waters of the River Jordan to be baptized. These are the feet by which Mary of Bethany delightedly sat. These are the feet that walked that last way, under the weight of the cross that would kill him. They are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

As the disciples stare at these hands and these feet, their minds and hearts reel with a flood of remembrances and an onslaught of emotions. They are transfixed by the ugliness and the bruising of the wounds that most of them had not stayed around to see being made. Because, when the disciples realized what was going to happen to those hands and feet, they had high-tailed it as far away as they could so that they would not have to hear the hammer, or the pain that it inflicted. And now, here they are, looking but not wanting to look.

"You can look at my hands and my feet now," Jesus says, in effect. "It's okay. The danger is past." Like spring rains suddenly flooding a dry gully, new life rushes in to the disciples, filling and overflowing the voids and nooks and crannies that had been sucked dry by Jesus' death. Or by their own guilt, disillusionment, or grief.

Jesus comes to let his disciples know that he has gone right through the heart of the danger, not around it, not away from it, and yet, he is here to be with them. Jesus doesn't come back to them all

nice and cleaned up and unmarred. Perhaps to show them, and us, that all things will be redeemed, even those things too awful to speak of, or to look at. Or to help them recognize him so that they – and we – never doubt that there is more than what we now know, and that God is with us every step of the way. Or perhaps to let them – and us – know that there is nothing more powerful than God’s love for us.

“You are witnesses of these things,” Jesus says to his friends and followers, entrusting the world to our care. We are to be witnesses to the living presence of Christ in this very messy world. So, when the battered and bruised world comes to us, hoping against hope for some sign, some evidence, of grace, redemption, and hope, we, the Body of Christ, the scarred and wounded hands and feet of Christ, can be witnesses. We can say, “Look at our hands at work in the world: binding wounds, serving meals, holding and caring, writing letters and petitions for change, picking up trash. Look at our feet: standing in solidarity with the least of these, walking into prisons and hospices to sit and visit, into bad neighborhoods to demand better schools and parks, into courthouses and legislatures to help change unfair systems, into community gardens to ensure all are fed.” And we can tell people that it is in the name of the risen Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to do these things.

*May the God who shakes heaven and earth,
Whom death could not contain,
Who lives to disturb and heal us,
Bless us with the power to go forth
And be witnesses of Christ Jesus. Amen. +*