

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 24:36b-48

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

April 15, 2018

The Third Sunday of Easter

It feels so good to be back with you all. Most of you know by now that as soon as Easter Sunday was over, Dwayne and I caught the first flight out Monday morning to fly to Cozumel for some much needed R&R. However, if you know anything about our travels, you know they often don't look much like relaxation but more like extreme summer camp for grown ups. This trip was no exception, together we logged in 21 dives, some at depths of almost 100 feet. Dwayne photographed amazing fish and I completed my Advanced Diving Certification. I got sea sick one too many times on our dive boat but we kept pushing forward because we didn't want to give up. As I was trying to hold it together, the dive instructor would ask, do you want to go back to shore? I would say...just one more dive, just one more! I hate to give up.

And here's what truly struck me – more than the fish, more than diving – was the overwhelming kindness and generosity of our dive crew. Every step of the way, they were always making sure we had what we needed, that our equipment was hooked up correctly, that we had fresh water to drink. It was almost over the top care so much so that it would have been easy to say it was just their job. But you know when someone is genuine. You know when they are doing something for you out of the goodness of who they are, not out of obligation for a paycheck or a tip. One instructor taught me everything I needed to know to NOT get sick...and it worked like a dream. I was beyond grateful.

I began to feel I needed to do something for them but they never accepted offers to help with anything so the best we could do in return is bring our instructors and boat crew glasses of fresh lemonade on our breaks.

Somehow, we became a beautiful community of people – together for one week in this moment in time and I have never felt more cared for.

I left our vacation wondering how this same kind of care translated into our lives in Goochland – when the scuba equipment is replaced by work loads and overtime hours, when sea sickness is replaced by illness or injury, when we go back to our daily lives and back to our community – how do we translate these lessons of mutual care and compassion?

Somehow there had to be a way to carry this feeling forward. It's like our Gospel reading for today when Jesus says to his disciples...you are witnesses to these things. What does witnessing this kind of care look like your life and in mine?

When I think of caregiving in a real, day to day sense, one thing stands out to me. That is that we don't always approach it with a spirit of willingness. It is often a burden or an obligation – something we have to do because there is no one else to help or it's something we feel we

must do because our family and friends have guilted us into a situation of helping that we really didn't want to be in. We have all been there. I think it's easy to talk about this idea of mutually caring for one another, of offering our genuine kindness and unconditional love to one another. It's idyllic in some ways but when we are honest, we might all acknowledge times when caregiving is just hard and tiresome. So I don't want to paint a picture that if we don't approach care for one another with giddy excitement or heartfelt joy that we are somehow lacking a compassion gene.

So when Jesus says you are witnesses to these things – what does he mean? Let's look at the conversation in Luke a little more closely.

There are two things you need to notice about what Jesus says and does that help bring to light the mutuality of caring. First, when the disciples are frightened when they first see Jesus after his resurrection, he tells them to look at his hands and feet. And then he asks them to touch his hands and feet. He invites them to see his scars, to see where he was broken. He wants them to come into his space and be with him. He didn't present an image of perfection – which he surely could have done if he had wanted to. Instead, he presented the disciples with the rawness of his life as though to say look where I have been.

He comforted them by showing them his life. In other words, witness where you have been to one another. Provide comfort by your willingness to say I have been there too and I am with you now.

Second, Jesus tells the disciples that he is hungry. He asks, "Have you anything to eat?" They give him a piece of broiled fish and he eats. He allowed the disciples to care for him. I love that the text says that he ate in their presence. It doesn't say that they ate together or that the disciples ate with him, although that certainly may have happened. But what we are told is that he simply ate in front of them, maybe as they watched.

Have you ever just sat with someone as they ate? Maybe someone you brought a meal to who needed is badly, maybe someone who was sick and you had to help feed them? There is such simplicity and love in such an act, an act where we are allowed to nourish one another. So Jesus in essence says, witness how to nourish each other when you need it the most.

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, he writes that "*only a suffering God can help.*" It's a curious statement but I think it says such much about what it means to live as witnesses to Christ's hands and feet. He explained it this way, "*To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism. . . but to be a human being. It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world....*"

Bonhoeffer is saying that we show one another care in the most profound ways when we show one another who we are. That's what Jesus was doing when he told the disciples to touch his hands and his feet. In other words, we witness care through sharing our humanity – and we

witness care through giving of our time. It doesn't have to be perfect or pretty. We don't have to bake the tastiest meal or the have the wittiest conversation. We simple have to show up.

Jesus invites the disciples to see him and to touch him. Then he asks them to feed him. Jesus models a kind of mutual caring that is based upon these things – seeing, touching, feeding. Basic human desires. Basic human needs. So start there, he says. Witness these things.

I made this statement last night at our community prayer service...I said - Imagine the kind of community we could create by simply approaching one another with such intention. Imagine the healing and wholeness it would bring, in our families, in our work places, in our towns.

Now, does this mean we will always look forward to caregiving? No, it doesn't. Does it mean that our relationships will suddenly transform? No, that takes time. But it does mean that we look at what Jesus calls us to witness to others, that we begin to strive to live into genuine, heartfelt care for one another. And when it's genuine, when it comes from a place of compassion and honesty, others will know.

Build your relationships on that kind of intention. Show others your hands and your feet.

Amen.