

From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...

Sunday, April 19, 2015

Preacher: Rev. Julie Olmsted

Scriptures: Luke 24: 36-48

Sermon: Hands and Feet

In life, it has been said, nothing is as it seems. I took a course once where we made collages of what were called “seemings.” These were not necessarily beautiful works of art. They were collages of the way things showed up for us personally, in our everyday lives. Like thoughts of not belonging, or of being damaged, or our fears and our resentments and perceived trials. We look at scripture and it may seem ordinary. It may seem unimportant. It may seem not even worth looking deeply into. But that’s what we do here: look deeply. And hopefully, somewhere along the road of life, during the week, in line at the grocery store, casually greeting a neighbor or a stranger, saying goodnight to a spouse or a child, that looking deeply here together has some impact in a moment, in a relationship, in a life.

To the disciples, Jesus seemed like an apparition, a ghost. They were “startled and afraid.” Why are you so surprised? Jesus says. (He must be being ironic here; surely he knows his appearance is unsettling, at the very least!) But then he says something interesting. He does NOT say, “Look into my eyes.” He doesn’t invite them to remember, “what he told them.” He simply says, “Look at my hands and feet.” Look at what I’ve been through. See my wounds are real. He could have surely opted to have become smooth and renewed in the flesh; anything was possible for him. But, beyond what Jesus seemed in this moment, there was the real ordeal he had suffered, the real journey he had undergone, the real ministry he had lived and taught and now was ready to pass on to those who witnessed this awesome, but still ordinary sight. How funny to be asked, “Do you have anything to eat here?” Of course, it’s what anyone on such a journey would want to know. But, but...is that it? Do you have anything to eat? We could say that Jesus is affirming the body. We could say that he is affirming creation, this ordeal we all go through. We might say that Jesus is saying by these words, Ketov, Hebrew for “It is good.” Our takeaway here might be that life is suffering, life is mysterious, life is challenging, but oh, my friends, life is good. And it isn’t always what it seems. The goodness of it might be hiding in plain sight, right here and right now, on the road, with a piece of fish, a touch of the hand-connection.

“Look at my hands and feet.” See not only me, but see what I have been through.

Touch me. Know that I am real, made of flesh and blood. I hurt, I bleed, I hunger, I triumph, I bless. "Peace be with you." What are we being told here?

When I was a child, I had an operation to get my tonsils removed. It was at St. Vincent's hospital in Monett, MO. This was when you received chloroform to go into surgery. I remember well an elderly nun who stood beside me and comforted me as I went under. She touched me and smiled sweetly. "You're pretty," I said to her drowsily. "Oh, my," she said. "No one has told me that for a very long time, honey." It seemed like this was a routine moment with an aging nun doing her job with a nervous child. But in that touch that I have often reflected on, I believe I felt the presence of Christ. In those hands I believe I knew wounds and trial and triumph and resurrection. I have never forgotten that moment of loving kindness.

My grandparents used to soak their feet on the front porch in the summertime. Nice hot water with Epsom salts. It seemed to soak away the tiredness and the drudgery of the day. My grandparents had 12 children and outlived six of them. They had wounds, for sure. My granny's hands held mine in worship, when she wasn't holding Papa's hand. Those hands wrung chicken's necks and made biscuits and gravy. They combed the unruly hair of many grandchildren. They held her beloved husband of 73 years in the casket as she wept loudly and long.

My mother was a waitress most of my growing up years. I was, too, during high school, college, and beyond. Both of us knew exhaustion and tired feet, feet that "felt like clubs", she used to say. My mom and I gave each other many foot massages with rubbing alcohol, so cool and refreshing, followed by lotion, warm and luxurious.

As a culture we seem so concerned with a pretty face or a trim and strong physique. I wonder if in this scripture we are being nudged to a different focus: hands and feet. For is it how we looked and who we wowed that is the important thing, at the end of the day and a life? Or is it who we served, comforted and guided, and where we walked and what it is we walked through? I believe the latter.

Everyone look at your hands. What do you see? Beauty? Age? Fatigue? Yesterday I was at a 150-year anniversary celebration of a church I used to serve in New York. I got my nails done; got a pedicure, too. As I sat there receiving all this great pampering (which I do a couple of times a year), I felt so comforted, so cared for, so tired and so grateful. It is a gift to serve others, oh yes. But it is a gift to let others serve us as well.

Look at your hands. How many meals have they served? How many babies have they held? How many people have they comforted? How many years have they worked? Jesus knew that the way to see who he truly was, was to recognize his humanity and

courage in what he had been through; who he had touched and where he had been.

There's a story of a man who was visiting heaven and hell. He was first escorted to a room with an amazing feast set on an elaborate table. People were sitting around the table and crying. You see they had very long forks and they could not get them to their mouths. (I guess they weren't allowed to use their hands.) This was hell. The man was shown another room with the exact same scene. Only everyone was joyful and radiant. They had taken the long forks and were feeding each other.

Hands and feet. They are perhaps the most important parts of the body of Christ. How poignant a lesson Jesus taught the disciples when he washed their feet in servant humility. Hands and feet tell a story of a life blessed by God and poured out for the sake of love itself.

Take your neighbor's hand. Look into their eyes and say, "Thank you for all you've done. Bless you for all you've been through. Peace be with you always."

This I believe is what Jesus wants to teach us, not just us here but us everywhere. Recognize each other's suffering. Feed each other. Serve each other. Be at peace.