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Year B, Easter 3

Acts 3:12-19
1 John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36b-48

“The Proof is in the pudding”

- If you’re curious, the original version of that phrase is, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating” ¹
 - Or even better yet, “The test of the pudding is in the eating”, suggesting the pudding might taste badly, or make you sick,
 - Or possibly be the best pudding you've ever had.
 - The only way you could really know is to eat it- try it for yourself
 - Testing something, proving something, requires personal involvement.
 - And that is exactly why I went on that ghost tour in Eureka Springs at the Crescent Hotel several years ago! :)
 - I wanted some proof.
 - We were in Eureka Springs on a family vacation
 - Katy had the idea- and we all wanted to go and see for ourselves- what does the most haunted hotel in America look like?
 - They have even featured this hotel on Ghost Hunters, the tv show! ²
 - We went on the ghost tour, heard all of the terrible stories, heard about the sightings over the years, But we didn’t see anything unusual
 - We were not deterred!
 - Katy and I decided to stay the night there on our last night, and even got to stay in one of the officially haunted rooms
 - We had baby Gaius with us
 - Still didn’t see anything
 - We did have one loud bump in the night which caused us both to sit straight up and look around
 - ...And then leave the light on the rest of the night

¹ <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/proof-of-the-pudding.html>

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crescent_Hotel_\(Eureka_Springs%2C_Arkansas\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crescent_Hotel_(Eureka_Springs%2C_Arkansas))

- But ultimately we did not see anything or hear anything that would convince us of a haunting
- I'm not sure if I am disappointed or relieved, but we did have a great time
- Startled and terrified, seeing ghosts, wanting proof- maybe you can see where this is going after hearing our Gospel reading this morning.
- Our readings are a bit out of order this morning, chronologically speaking
 - Luke certainly should come first, followed by Acts and then First John
 - Most biblical scholars believe Luke and Acts are written by the same author,
 - Perhaps even intended to be the first and second halves to one story³
 - Written most likely after the gospel of Mark, before the end of the first century⁴
 - This reading comes immediately after Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus⁵
 - Where he had appeared to two of the disciples, had eaten and talked with them, and only then did they recognize him
 - They are all back together discussing these things, perhaps even looking over their shoulder and jumping at loud noises
 - Stories about an empty tomb, about mysterious appearances on the road, and now they were all together their imaginations probably getting the best of them
 - And Jesus himself "stood among them."
 - The gospel writer says it so casually: Jesus just was standing there... as if it happened all the time
 - But it did not. And they were scared and thought they were seeing a ghost.
 - While this time they did recognize him, they did not recognize enough to not be afraid
 - I see it in my minds eye, all the disciples taking a big step back and huddling to one side while Jesus tries to calm them down
 - In what is almost a comical relief fashion designed to break the tension, Jesus asks them for something to eat

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke%E2%80%93Acts>

⁴ Introductory notes to the Gospel of Luke, HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV

⁵ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/easter4b/#Acts4%3A5-12>

- What is so important in this story is the two things that force us to embrace a real and physical Jesus
- First, the touching of his hands and feet. Jesus still has flesh and bones.
- Then he eats with them, the same food they eat.
- Jesus may have died and and resurrected, but he was still the same person he was before.
- Once again they found the risen Christ to be incarnational, or in the flesh
- By the time we get to our Acts reading, the disciples were over their fear
 - Immediately before Peter addresses the crowd today, they had just healed a lame man in the name of Jesus at the gate of the temple
 - People had gathered, perhaps wanting an explanation, or wanting another miracle
 - Probably wanting proof. Maybe certainty...
 - Fr Al preached last week that certainty was the opposite of faith, but we still long for it, don't we?
 - Peter takes the opportunity to teach them that it was in fact God who had acted through them, and through their belief in God's son
 - Don't put your faith in the messenger, but in the source.
 - He tells them to "repent", literally to change their minds about Jesus
 - And to become witnesses.
 - It was another incarnational moment: hands-on healing for the lame man, and a teaching moment with the crowd
 - It was not certainty he offered- still a lot of mystery and question around the resurrection
 - But it was tangible proof of the risen Christ's ongoing and mysterious work within this group of believers
- What I find absolutely amazing in these two stories as we have them paired this morning
 - Is that the scared and skiddish disciples go from being scared of ghosts, to boldly proclaiming what they have experienced
 - And I want to know: how did they do that, and how do we do it today?
 - Now we are not quite as bad as the disciples were in that upper room
 - We are not as scared, not as doubtful, certainly having more composure in our Sunday morning worship services
 - Like the disciples in that first story we're trying to figure it all out

- As things change, as they always do, and we are in the “almost, but not yet” part of the transition
- What does it mean? What will it look like? It can be disorienting.
- The question is how do we get from here to boldly proclaiming what God has done and is doing in our midst?
- Perhaps the path is before us in our readings this morning
 - The disciples were transformed simply by being in the presence of the risen Christ
 - It changed everything: their lives took on a whole different purpose.
 - They were compelled to tell others about it, to share it.
 - They could do nothing else: there is something about experiencing Christ that is rejuvenating and dislocating at the same time.
 - We are comforted with peace, but left with an itch that can only be scratched by sharing what has happened to us.
 - So what did the disciples do? First, they ate together.
 - Is it any wonder why eating has become one of the two principle sacraments in the church?
 - It has changed a bit this year for sure: Initially just the bread, thanks to the possible spread of COVID
 - And now with the little individual cups bringing both bread and wine in pandemic conscious ways
 - It is not quite as communal as sharing one chalice together or having a bit potluck, but we are still here, still together, even when that is virtual
 - We eat with people in the Eucharist and welcome them into our community through baptism: that is the core of who we are.
 - Jesus, in both the Road to Emmaus and today’s post-resurrection appearance, ate with his disciples
 - Not to even mention feeding the five thousand and the last supper
 - Second, the disciples reached out to others around them.
 - They healed the lame man at the temple, and then told others what had happened to them and about Christ
 - Let’s keep doing that too: reaching out to others, like the disciples did
 - St. Michael’s has outreach in its bones- I love that
 - The Friday morning men’s group is leading the charge in regular food drives- the next one on Pentecost Sunday
 - The outreach committee continues to give grants to help organizations serve the poor and the needy- 10% of our budget!
 - And just wait for the outreach outdoor concert this summer

- My greatest hope and goal is that we can continue to be purveyors of God's grace like those early believers
- Through eating together- the best and safest ways we can...
- And reaching out
- I want this to be a place where the risen Christ becomes incarnational
- It is refreshing to remember that even though many things are happening at once
 - Maybe it feels a little chaotic, or unlike what was before
 - We are not the first community to feel this way
 - Long before we were here, the disciples gathered in that room, everything that was familiar to them was lost
 - They kept hearing tales that Christ was alive, which only increased the confusion and anxiety
 - They were so worked up that they thought they saw a ghost.
 - But instead, God was working something new within them, transforming them into God's agents in the world
 - The risen Christ was among them- they experienced him, touched him, and took him to those who needed to hear the good news
 - My prayer is that we will do the same
 - When it comes to thinking about the resurrection, wondering what and how it happened
 - We will never have know everything, never understand, never have certainty
 - And yet we must be the proof that Christ rose from the dead and is still working and transforming lives today.
 - That when people come here looking for hope and proof, they will find it because they will see us.

Amen.