

Can I Get a Witness?

By: Meagan McLaughlin

April 14, 2024. We are all witnesses. This week we were witnesses to the eclipse. And just like Jesus' disciples, we're called to be witnesses of the risen Christ, in flesh and blood.

Readings: [1 John 3:1-7](#), [Luke 24:36b-48](#)

*** Transcript ***

Just a few days ago there was an event, one that had many of us clamoring to be witnesses. Classes at school were shortened, and I myself bugged off early from a Zoom meeting so I wouldn't miss it. Vacation days were redeemed, hours spent in cars driving to where the experience would be. Complete. Total. I checked into some options myself. I considered heading south (the anticipated traffic and aforementioned Zoom meeting got in the way of that plan) or maybe getting tickets to ride the riverboats by the Arch (they were booked), and I settled for being a witness closer to home. Karen and I secured the cats inside and we joined our neighbors in our back yards, heads turned upwards — with eclipse glasses, of course — watching the moon as it covered the sun, feeling the air cool, and experiencing the earth darkening in the middle of the afternoon. It was awesome. It's not every day, after all, that we get to witness a solar eclipse.

The disciples were called to be witnesses too, and they had their own set of questions to answer. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and John, and Salome were the first to see the empty tomb, as we heard on Easter Sunday, and we know it took them a while to share what they had seen. And then, in the verses just before Jesus appeared to the disciples in today's gospel, two of the disciples were walking the road to Emmaus and they were joined by Jesus on the road, and they went back and told the disciples what had happened.

And the disciples were talking about all of this, in that upper room. Perhaps they were debating, as many of us did, about where they should go to find Jesus for themselves. Should they go to the grave again? Should they all go down the road to Emmaus, in case Jesus showed up there to break bread with all of them? Or should they just stay where they were, where they felt at least somewhat safe from the religious leaders and soldiers they feared might be after them? They may have wondered if the story the women and the two who walked the road to Emmaus could be trusted. They were all overwhelmed with shock and grief and fear, after all. Who knows what they actually saw? Jesus was dead, they knew that for sure. He couldn't really be alive, could he?

And as they were discussing all of these things, Jesus himself came to them. He appeared in that upper room, and wished them peace and showed them his scars. And then Jesus asked for food, because he could tell that the wounds weren't enough to convince the disciples. And as they experienced these things, their hearts and minds were opened, things made clear to them that hadn't made any sense before. And Jesus called them witnesses.

We're called to be witnesses too, called to tell the story not just of the celestial event of the eclipse — although that was pretty amazing, even from my backyard. We're called to be witnesses of the risen Christ, in flesh and blood. To see and even touch the scars in his hands and his feet and his side. To watch him eat, chewing the fish provided by the disciples and swallowing it down his esophagus into his belly, just like all of us do. To have our hearts and minds opened to the miracle that is being lived out right in front of us. And to tell that story to everyone we meet.

There are so many ways, and places, and people, in whom we can see Jesus among us. I was witness to Jesus alive this week in the passion of a father advocating at the capitol in Jefferson City for his son, who is experiencing the worst of conditions in a nursing home here in St. Louis since he was the victim of gun violence at the age of 19. This father was seen, in his pain, resolution, and hope, as he shared his story. He was a witness, and we were witnesses to him.

Trans people had a chance to be seen in all their belovedness on Trans Visibility Day, which this year just happened to fall on Easter Sunday. How appropriate to celebrate their lives of challenge and beauty and resilience, on resurrection day.

I saw Jesus alive in the joy several clergy experienced as they shepherded a baby kitty named Motka from Oklahoma to Ohio to be embraced in love at her new forever home.

The disciples didn't believe it right away that Jesus had risen and was standing in front of them. It wasn't until they saw Jesus chewing and swallowing that they got it, and their minds and hearts began to absorb and transform. That very human act changed everything, like Jesus' voice calling "Mary!" on Easter Sunday morning, and the breaking of bread on the road to Emmaus allowed the other disciples to become witnesses to the resurrection. It was as if these actions served as a new pair of glasses for the disciples — resurrection glasses, if you will — allowing the disciples to recognize the risen Jesus as he stood in their midst. It enabled them to tell the story.

And that leaves us with a question: what does it take for us to recognize the risen Christ among us? What does it take to know our own belovedness, as it is described in the letter to John today — to know that we are children of God? What does it take for us to know the belovedness of those around us? What kind of glasses do we need to truly see? What story do we have to tell? And can I get a witness today?

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

2024, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48