

2021 April 18 Rev. Sara M. Holland Sermon

Scripture: Acts 3:12 - 19 & Luke 24: 36 - 48

Title: "What is Well?"

Theme: Eastertide, "Christ Among Us," witnesses to miracles, hymn - it is well

Intro

I absolutely love that Jesus asks for food in this text. Before Jesus gets to the 'juice' of what he needs to say, he asks for some food. "Have you anything here to eat?" Not just Jesus, the resurrected Jesus asks this. I love it. I just love fish and I also love to eat so this piece of scripture really pulls me right in; I guess some part of me creates this image of sitting down with Jesus over a piece of a couple pieces of haddock. Silly, I know, but still - hungry Jesus might catch our human attention.

Jesus needs some sustenance before he gets to the good stuff; like when we eat a lot in preparation for some big job or test. In our scripture we hear the earthly sustenance pointing Jesus back to the main point - the point is to proclaim what they have seen and witnessed.

This risen Savior, one who is to bring love to all.

Before I heard Margot play a single note this week I was touched by her selection of “It is Well,” which she offered as our prelude and we’ll be singing in just a bit. Like so many hymns which many of us hear throughout our lives, this is one that lives and breathes with many of our spiritual journeys. See, no matter where we are in our Christian walk, we are ever challenged to be the witnesses to love which Jesus has called us to be. Part of that is declaring ‘It is well’ with the knowledge that God’s loving hands surround us at all times. We should name today that ‘It is well,’ is not a flippant phrase negating the struggles of the masses or of individuals. It is a phrase which is based in the scriptures of the Gospel, the New Testament, and the Old Testament (also called the Hebrew Bible).

In saying or singing, it is well, we point to that part of ourselves which is beyond the human part of living and we make space for the supernatural part of being in Creation and being a part of Christ’s divine plan. We point to our souls, just as the hymn names plainly.

We also call out and name this very key part of our faith -- God is the actor -- and humans are invited to be a part of something bigger than any isolated moment. The first verse of the hymn names the truth of the human experience: “when sorrows like sea billows roll” Even so, it is well. Before Jesus asks for food he offers peace as he enters in this scripture reading. “Peace be with you,” Jesus says to this group of people - a group who has lost their dear leader. Part of me feels like this is a bit dismissive of their feelings but this was a traditional way to greet people at the time. “Peace be with you.”

They are afraid and yet pleased to see Jesus is resurrected and then Jesus reminds them of their call after he has a bite to eat - “You are witnesses of these things.”

And for us, today, our challenge is grappling with the same notion “We are witnesses of these things.” We are witnesses of miracles and part of this is naming that all is well with God. Again, this is not to take away from the troubles of the world;

to say, 'it is well,' is to name God's ultimate authority and to make clear that neither rulers nor principalities can overcome redemptive Love, which is revealed to us in the person and path of Christ Jesus.

One of the most amazing Christian mystics is Julian of Norwich. Julian of Norwich suffered tragic adversity and one quote attributed to her is, indeed: "All shall be well." She also lived in isolation for some time and records show that she would repeat this phrase over and over. All shall be well. All shall be well.

Even knowing the history of our faith communities and others believers around we might still stand asking aloud or even directing interrogations at God: "What is well?" This virus wreaks havoc on our society and societies all over the world. People with guns continue to kill - isolated attacks and mass shootings. . . . The environment weeps literally and metaphorically . . . and we are working to just keep ourselves healthy and happy but do so in a low risk manner which sometimes feels impossible. So we turn our gaze to our divine Savior asking: "What is well?"

You. You, yourself, you . . .

Are.

Witnesses.

We are witnesses. Whether we like it or not, we are witnesses to good all the time. To point to the theology and glory of God him or herself there is the miracle of resurrection; and of course we see that lived out in the movements of creation but there is more - we are witnesses to so much more than suffering it is just harder to name this.

2 days ago someone talked with me about the miracles that happen everyday in interpersonal relationships. Imagine, a couple reconciling after months of counseling or imagine a couple making a hard decision that they must change the way they are doing things.

We are witnesses to so much good:

Think of the miracles teachers have worked in this past year. Of course, I know some students continue to struggle with remote learning but many teachers are working miracles and have worked tirelessly to aid students in their learning.

We are witnesses to good: *8 mins*

We hear all about the impending climate disaster but there ARE solutions for the doom that we hear about so often. There are wind turbines, there are electric vehicles, there are scientific developments supporting ecosystems.

We are witnesses to good:

Before our eyes, the earth is coming back to life, and is being resurrected, even in the midst of the damage that we have done to it. These are examples of redemptive and constant love. It is well -

We are witnesses to good.

For all of the disease and the cancer and the illness that plagues so many of us, there are countless researchers and advocates working towards cures for so many of such struggles. For every ailment there seems to be a charity race to address the issue at hand - we are witnesses to good. It is well. For us

Christian folks, we say this because it is so and because we are creating it to be so, with God. We join in the chorus of God's love and glory.

I'd like to circle back around to the short word I shared with the kids earlier.

When I referenced peace and security during the children's message, I was speaking of some words and ideas offered by theologian Nancy R. Blakey.

Blakey discusses this Lukan text from the pastoral perspective. Blakey notes: “The power of the resurrection is the power to plant the seeds of transformation.” She goes on declaring: “The word of God calls us to peace rather than security.”¹ So yes, we are called to sit in the loving arms of a God that gives us peace and grants us a sense of calm but this does not necessarily mean security. The reason this is so is because we - us - our hearts, our minds, our bodies - we are called to that transformation -- the transformation that is planted in the roots of our congregations that ties all the way back into Jesus’ ministry. Again, she declares: “The power of resurrection is the power to plant the seeds of transformation.”

So -- yes, it is well. It is well because of the path before us. It is well because there are miracles and we are witnesses of this. It is well, because we, even we, are invited to plant those seeds of transformation. We are invited to name that God’s glory moves with us this week. So yes, it is well, it is well.

¹Nancy R. Blakey, “Luke 24: 36b - 48 - Pastoral Perspective,” in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word - Year B, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 426.

As Julian of Norwich stated over and over - all shall be well. We may not know how everything will turn out, but we do know that seeds of transformation have been and are being planted. Today, sow seeds which are divine, plant seeds of redemptive Love.

Bibliography

Blakey, Nancy R. "Luke 24: 36b - 48 - Pastoral Perspective." *In Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word - Year B, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, 426. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.