

Robin Dodge
Holy Faith, Santa Fe
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Easter 3 – Year B
Acts 3.12-19
Psalm 4
1 John 3.1-7
Luke 24.36b-48

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On that first Easter Day, the Risen Christ appeared to his disciples and said, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled....Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day....You are witnesses of these things.”

Later, as recorded in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter told the people in Jerusalem, “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate...you rejected the Holy and Righteous One...and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses...In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.”

Both in the words of Jesus and the words of Peter, it’s clear that the disciples are called to be witnesses – witnesses to the suffering, death, and resurrection of their Lord. We all know what witnesses are. We’ve seen enough courtroom dramas to know about witnesses. In a courtroom there’s a witness stand where the witness sits and tells a story – a story of what she or he has seen and heard. Different witnesses tell different

stories because each witness has a particular perspective of what he or she has seen and heard. We hear from different witnesses to get a better picture of the truth.

We all have our unique perspective – our particular story of what we have seen and heard. Each of the Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – had a unique perspective on the life of Jesus: the teachings that Jesus offered, the healings that Jesus performed, the suffering and death that Jesus undertook, and the resurrection that Jesus experienced. Not all the Gospel accounts about the life of Jesus agree with one another. That doesn't mean that they're false or that they didn't happen that way; it merely means that the Gospel writer had a unique perspective on the way things happened in Jesus' life.

That's why today's Gospel story by Luke sounds a lot like John's account of a resurrection appearance by Jesus that we heard last week. The resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples and says, "Peace be with you." In last week's account, he shows them the holes in his hands and side. This week he shows them his hands and his feet. Last week, John's emphasis was on Thomas coming to belief. This week, Luke's emphasis is on Jesus resurrected in the flesh – not as a ghost – so Jesus eats some fish in the presence of the disciples. Different stories – different perspectives – on the appearance of Jesus after his death, but both witnesses to the resurrected Christ.

The first disciples were witnesses of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, and witnessed to others about God's redeeming love, healing, and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is full of accounts of this witnessing. In today's account from Acts, Peter witnesses to the crowd after healing a crippled beggar. The crowd were then witnesses to that healing and went out and

witnessed to others about God's redeeming love, healing, and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. In this way belief in Jesus Christ grew, the faith spread, and the number of witnesses to Jesus Christ increased to the present day.

Now the Greek word for witness is "maturia." It's from the Greek that we get our word "martyr." Indeed, many people were martyred – they did die – for witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ. The early church was persecuted by the Roman Empire and had to go underground. Followers of Jesus, known as "The Way," had to worship secretly because if followers publicly announced that they were Christian, they would be put to death.

One of the most celebrated accounts of early Christian martyrdom involves a young woman named Perpetua from Carthage and two of her slaves and two other Carthaginians. Witnessing to their faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, they refused to sacrifice to the divinity of the Roman Emperor. They were arrested and held in prison under miserable conditions. In front of the judge, despite the pleadings of her aged father, Perpetua reaffirmed, "I am a Christian." She and her companions were sent to the arena to be mangled by a leopard, a boar, a bear, and a savage cow. After miraculously surviving their bout with the animals, eventually all were put to death by the sword. The soldier who struck Perpetua was inept and missed, so she guided the sword for him to pierce her own throat. All because she witnessed to her faith in Jesus Christ!

We forget that people were willing to be martyrs – to be put to death as witnesses to their faith in Jesus Christ. Even today in our world people are still being killed for their belief in Jesus Christ. A few years ago the terrorist organization Al -

Shabaab killed many at a university in Kenya specifically because they were Christian. It was reported that student members of the Christian Union there cried “Jesus, save us” immediately before they were gunned down. We have also heard of those in Syria and Libya who have been beheaded by ISIS because they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. Also in our own day, the term “martyr” has been hijacked because extremists have twisted their witnessing to publicly die at the hands of others for their faith into dying by their own hand and taking as many innocent victims with them to instill terror in the hearts of their enemies. This is a perversion of martyrdom!

In our own country, we may not have an opportunity to be martyrs – to die for our faith – but we are called, like the first disciples, to witness to God’s redeeming love, healing, and reconciliation in the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we witness? How do we talk to others about how God is working in our lives? It’s just like how we go about everything else in our lives. It’s no different! If you like a good restaurant, don’t you recommend it to your friends? Well, if you like attending church, why don’t you recommend it to your friends? Be open to where God is acting in your life – count your blessings, see where the hand of God is leading you, think of the pitfalls you have avoided – and then publicly give thanks to God in Jesus Christ.

Just like the first disciples who witnessed the Risen Jesus, the crowd who witnessed Peter’s healing of the crippled beggar, and the succeeding generations who witnessed to their faith, today we are witnesses to God’s redeeming love, healing, and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. To whom will we go and witness to what God through the Risen Jesus is working in our lives and doing in this place?