

A Storytelling Commentary on Luke 24:36b-48

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Jesus' first words to the disciples after his resurrection are, "Peace be with you." This is performative language that is an action. Jesus gives them peace in the context of the turmoil, the fear, and the hostility that has been their experience during these days in Jerusalem. Jesus is also responding to their fear, to their uncertainty as to whether it is really him or whether it is a ghost. In the ancient world a ghost was usually a malevolent spirit. There was good reason to be afraid of disembodied spirits in the ancient world because they were usually out to do harm to whomever they encountered. A consistent motif in ancient literature is that disembodied spirits are something to fear.

Jesus addresses the disciples' fear and doubts directly. My sense is that, on the one hand, there is a sense of calm in Jesus' voice; but also, there is the sense that Jesus is amused at the response of the disciples: "Why, *why* are you afraid and why do doubts arise?" His amusement might be expressed by a smile from you as the storyteller. Jesus' words express surprise as well as love and understanding.

Jesus telling his disciples to look at his hands and feet evokes memories of the crucifixion. What are they going to see? They are going to see the marks of the nails in his hands and in his feet. In effect the audience is invited to see these marks as well, in their imaginations. The memories of the crucifixion are brought back by Jesus' words, but now in the context of his presence with them. The marks are a sign of his identity.

Another confirmation that Jesus is not a disembodied spirit is his eating a piece of fish. This is a body, a person who has now been resurrected.

The tone of Jesus' speech is the most important thing to work on in the telling of this story. It's a tone of joy, understanding, compassion, and good humor. Jesus' words to the disciples after they calm down and are able to hear him are words of fulfillment of what was spoken and of what was written. They are words that he spoke to them while he was with them: "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." It is all focused on what was written in the scriptures.

But also implicit in this focus on writing at the end of the Gospel, is the understanding that the reference is both the scriptures that were written in the past *and* the scriptures that are being written by the composition of the Gospel itself. Where is it written that the Messiah is "to suffer and die and on the third day rise and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations"? It is written in the Gospel of Luke. It is right here that the words of Jesus have been written. The Gospel itself is set in continuity with the scriptures of the past. Furthermore, the whole role of writing is defined in relation to the fulfillment of the will of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah.

The final words of this part of the story are, "You are witnesses. You have seen it. You have experienced it." The witnesses are both the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking, and they are also the disciples who are being spoken to in the telling of the story itself. These are words that are addressed to the audience as disciples. That happened then, and it happens now, in the telling of the story: those who are being addressed are those who are the witnesses of these things. They are the witnesses of the story and of the experience that is present in the hearing and participation in the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

What is that good news? Peace. Peace be with you. Peace be with the world. Peace be present now, as then. Peace is at the core of the good news of the Gospel.