



# ZUMBRO

LUTHERAN CHURCH

*A Glimpse of Resurrection Life*

Pastor Vern Christopherson

April 18, 2021

Luke 24:36-49NSRV

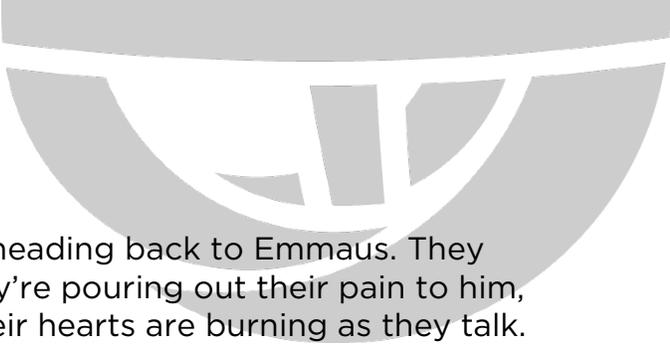
<sup>36</sup>While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup>They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." <sup>40</sup>And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup>While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate in their presence.

<sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, "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." <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

Another Easter has come and gone. Much like last year, our celebration was muted: a handful of singers, a small bell choir, a couple of brass players, a quiet garden. And most telling of all: there were no boisterous crowds scrambling for a place to park, and sit, and join in festive Easter worship.

We long for the good old days - and I'm sure they'll be back - but the fact of the matter is, coronavirus probably helps us better understand the the first Easter. The details are sketchy, but they go something like this. Early in the morning a few women head for the tomb. Their hearts are weighed down with grief. When they arrive at the garden, they're shocked to find that the stone has been rolled back. Some angels try to tell them that Jesus isn't there—he's been raised from the dead—but their hearts are pounding so loudly they can barely hear it.

So far, at least, this is hardly the stuff of a majestic organ or a soaring choir. No, it's shrouded in mystery. Nobody knows for sure what's happened. The empty tomb doesn't prove anything. Someone could have stolen the body. Things begin to change only when the Risen Christ starts showing up in people's lives.



Luke shares a couple of stories. Two disciples are heading back to Emmaus. They meet up with a shadowy stranger. Before long they're pouring out their pain to him, recounting the sad events of the last few days. Their hearts are burning as they talk. But not until they sit down and break bread together do they finally get a glimpse of who it is. And then – poof – the stranger is gone.

The two disciples hurry back to Jerusalem to tell the others. They're gathered in the Upper Room. That's where today's gospel begins. Suddenly the shadowy stranger shows up again. They're terrified, not at all sure what they are seeing. The stranger reassures them, "Don't be afraid. Why do you doubt? Can't you see that it's me?"

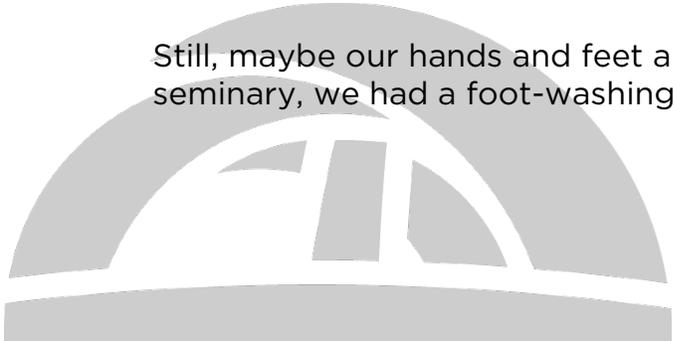
How can this be? People don't come back from the grave. Oh, the ancient Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, that some divine spark lives on after we're gone, but that isn't what's happening here – right? What are they seeing? Is it wishful thinking? Is it a ghost? Has Jesus somehow been resuscitated? One thing seems clear: it's often not easy to recognize people when we're not expecting to see them.

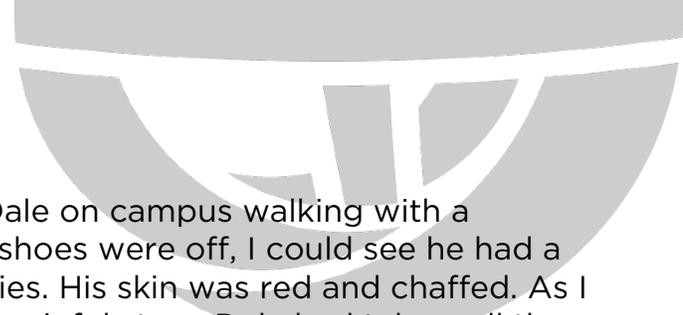
So, here's a question for you: do you have any trouble recognizing people when they're wearing a mask? I do, especially when I'm not expecting them. Why is it hard? I suppose we get used to looking into people's eyes, and seeing the expressions on their faces, and correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't it seem like everybody's hair looks different these days? Here's another question: if you bump into a stranger and are not sure who it is, what do you do? Ask? Pretend that you know? Live with your doubts?

Almost all the Easter stories, including the one for today, have an element of doubt to them, a mixture of amazement and disbelief. Pandemic or not, we can understand that. Writer Michael Novak says that doubt is the razor's edge that runs through every soul. We all have the same information to work with, says Novak, but that information is sometimes contradictory, and we aren't sure what to do with it. A person thinks she recognizes the voice of a long-time friend, but she hesitates to call her by name because she isn't sure. A man prays for a father who's been abusing his mother for twenty years – and some weeks go better than others – but lasting change never seems to come. A daughter prays for a mom who's had a stroke, but she notices only slight improvement. So, what should they do – give up or continue to hold out hope? We believe and we doubt. The razor's edge runs through us all.

Jesus senses the doubt in his disciples. In an effort to reassure them, he says, "Look at my hands and my feet." It's an odd way to identify himself. He's not saying, "Listen to my voice" or "Look into my eyes." He's encouraging them to identify him by observing parts of the body we normally don't see.

Still, maybe our hands and feet are more telling than we know. When I was in seminary, we had a foot-washing service on a Maundy Thursday. I volunteered to wash





feet. I came to a classmate named Dale. I'd seen Dale on campus walking with a decided limp, but I wasn't sure why. Now that his shoes were off, I could see he had a clubbed foot. He had scars from numerous surgeries. His skin was red and chaffed. As I carefully washed those feet, I started imagining the painful steps Dale had taken, all the hurdles he had to cross. It was a profoundly moving experience to wash Dale's feet. I will never forget them.

Look at my hands and my feet," Jesus says to his followers. Of course, it's the wounds he wants them to see. It's the wounds that mark us, that shape and mold us into the people we will someday become.

As the disciples look at Jesus' wounds, I imagine them remembering events from their time together. They see hands that once broke bread for hungry multitudes; hands that touched lepers—something no one was supposed to do—and in that personal touch came healing. They see feet that carried Jesus over hundreds of dusty roads; feet that took him to the city of Jericho where he met up with an inquisitive tax collector named Zacchaeus sitting up in a tree; feet that took him to the cobblestone streets of Jerusalem where he was forced to drag a heavy cross behind him.

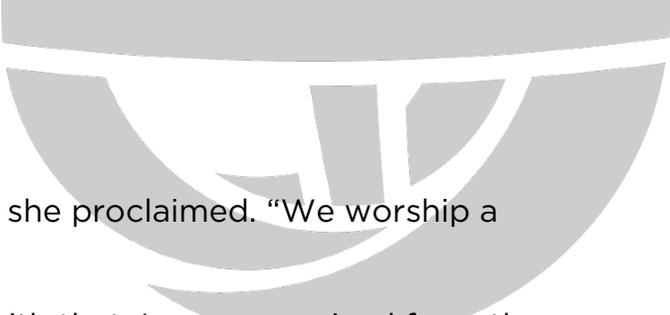
That Easter evening, as Jesus stands before his followers, the room suddenly gets very quiet. There's no denying that those hands and feet are wounded. They have holes in them, angry-looking bruises that are painfully hard to see. The disciples watch and they wonder. They believe and they doubt. The razor's edge is running through their souls.

"Go ahead," Jesus says, "touch me." He wants them to know he understands their doubts and fears. He wants them to know he has gone *through* the danger and not *around* it. He wants them to see his hands and feet because, in some mysterious sense, they tell the truth of what's happened to him. And maybe, just maybe, as those disciples look on in amazement, a tiny part of them will begin to realize that it is Jesus who is standing before them, the One who died, but who somehow - miraculously - has been raised to life.

Isn't it intriguing that the risen Christ has any wounds at all? You sort of expect him to be perfect, to have a brand, new body. But the wounds of Good Friday are still visible. Easter - God's great triumph over death - does not erase the marks of suffering. Jesus' appearance suggests that we cannot recognize the risen Christ, let alone believe in him, apart from his wounds.

I once had a spirited conversation about this with my wife's grandmother, Viola. Viola was the matriarch of the family. She had strong opinions about lots of things. One day she was saying how much she disliked crucifixes. I took the bait: *Why?* She thought they were a poor testimony to Easter. The longer the conversation went on, the more





inspired Viola become: “We have an empty cross!” she proclaimed. “We worship a risen Savior, not a dead one!”

Well, I suppose Viola had a point. We confess by faith that Jesus *was* raised from the dead. Still, just because someone has a crucifix doesn’t mean they don’t believe in the resurrection. They might simply be choosing to remember the suffering. And isn’t that a key question in today’s gospel – can you have the Savior apart from the suffering?

Another question is closely related: can you be a follower of the Risen Christ apart from those wounds? Soon Jesus will be sending his followers to all sorts of places they aren’t expecting to go. And even though their lives will include moments of Easter celebration and joy, they will forever be linked to the One who carried the cross and has the wounds to prove it.

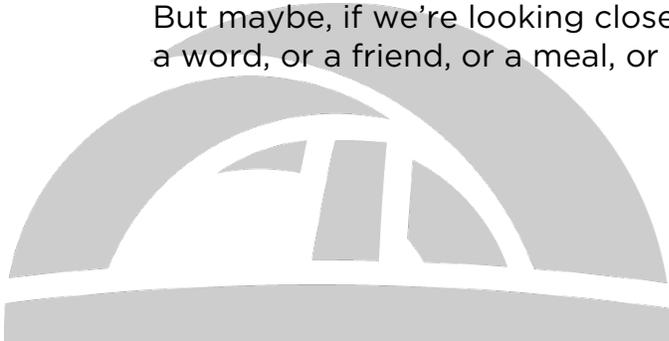
Writer Henri Nouwen has a book entitled, *The Wounded Healer*. Nouwen makes the point that the very wounds we carry with us enable us to better care for each other. Nouwen writes: I may not have experienced everything that you have, but we share a common humanity and pain. So, says Nouwen, here’s the challenge: If we can drop our pretenses and relate to one another out of our woundedness, then perhaps we have a chance for healing. In fact, *our* suffering can become redemptive for *others*.

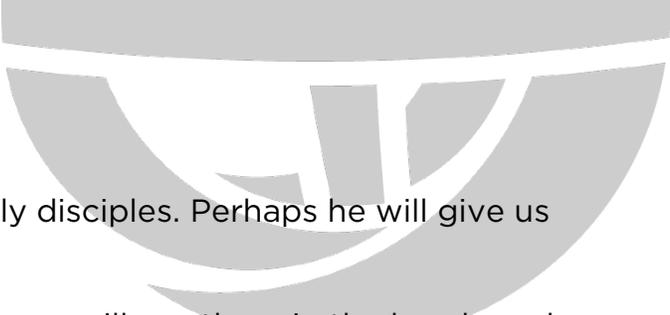
Let me give you an example of this. A woman was assaulted in her backyard. It happened in broad daylight—at ten o’clock in the morning. It was a frightening ordeal for her. Through a good counselor and a loving husband, she eventually worked through much of the pain. One day the counselor gave her an assignment: she was to tell what had happened to someone other than a family member. She chose a man named Joe. Her pastor was surprised by the choice. “Why Joe?” he asked. “He’s a sometimes recovering, sometimes not, alcoholic. Over the years he’s lost any number of jobs. Why not find someone more fitting?” The woman paused and replied, “Because Joe knows what it’s like to sink to the very depths of hell and live to tell about it.”

Nouwen makes a point: “There are wounds that can heal.” Strange, but somebody whom the world regards as a failure bears wounds that may lead to another’s wholeness. Indeed, maybe the only way any of us get healed is through a *wounded* healer.

In the quiet of this year’s Easter celebration, we long for the Risen Christ to come to us. To be honest, we’re not always sure what’s beyond the grave. We’re not always sure what it means that God raised Jesus up. The razor’s edge runs through our souls.

But maybe, if we’re looking closely, the Risen Christ *will come to us* through a song, or a word, or a friend, or a meal, or a prayer. When he comes, it will likely be in some





quiet and unexpected way, much like for those early disciples. Perhaps he will give us a glimpse of resurrection life, of his wounds.

And if we don't see those wounds directly, perhaps we will see them in the hands and feet of his followers. You know who I'm talking about...followers with hands that have cared for the sick, given bread to the hungry, reached out to hold someone who's hurting...followers with feet that have chased after children, stood up for a cause, gone looking for the lost.

Friends, if you believe Easter is true, I ask you to trust that the Risen Christ will call you to places you aren't expecting to go. Christ might even say to you: "I want you to be my wounded healers, to bear my hands and feet, my wounds, for the sake of the world for which I died." Amen.

