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“Taking the First Step”

Texts: 1 John 3:1 – 7; Luke 24:36b – 48

Preached at KVCC

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On any given day, there are three to four readings to select from to use as a springboard for reflection. The readings for today are from Acts 3, lines 12 – 19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3, lines 1-7, and Luke 24, line 36b-48. I am going to share two of them.

### **1 John 3:1-7**

3:1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

3:2 Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will has not be revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

3.3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

3.4 Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness, sin is lawlessness.

3.5 You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

3.6 No one who abides him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

3.7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

### **Luke 24:36b-48**

24:36b While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

24:37 They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

24:38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

24:39 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."

24:40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

24:41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

24:42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish,

24:43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

24:44 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."

24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

24:46 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,

24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

24:48 You are witnesses of these things.

### Taking the First Step

There are several ways of reflecting on these readings, first though I'd like us to step back and reflect on what has happened, and the impact of Jesus's death and his subsequent walking amongst the living had on the apostles.

For all the time the disciples had spent with Jesus, for all the miracles they had witnessed, for all words they heard him speak, they were frightened by his death, and how he had been brought to death.

Imagine Peter, who had been shamed when realizing he in fact had disowned Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Consider his and his comrade's shock at witnessing the religious leadership calling for Jesus's crucifixion, and the ferociousness and finality of that end. They were terrified. They didn't know what to do. Their leader had been brutally taken away from them, tortured, killed, and buried behind a huge stone in a hillside chamber. The intensity and finality of that moment must have been devastating. They gathered together to hide and protect themselves from people and officials who they felt may wished to do them similar harm.

You can imagine them thinking, "Wow, if they did that to Jesus, how can we possibly stand up to that, we who have none of his gifts, we're just fishermen and shepherds."

And then three days later Jesus shows up, not at first to them but to Mary Magdalene, and then Mary, mother of James, Salome, and Joanna. Then Jesus met Peter, who was suffering from having disowned him, and then two people along the road that had been drawn by his message

but were dispirited by his death and heading home. At days end, he joined the apostles in the room where they had had the Last Supper and now had barricaded themselves.

In all of these situations the people Jesus met initially failed to recognize him, they then broke bread or ate fish with him, and then he is revealed to them reminding them of God's love and his teachings.

The Acts, John, and the Gospel of Luke are believed to have been written about 80 to 90 AD, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering in of the Hebrew people and their scholars. They were written and delivered to a largely secular audience located some distance from Palestine. Their goal is to pass the torch, to pass the story of Jesus and his teachings on to people who were not there, and to do so in a way that would connect with them and spread his word and love to a still broader audience.

They have two common messages, Jesus was a real person, more than that he was the son of God, and they know this as they witnessed his death and resurrection, and second, we are all God's children and we have been provided an opportunity and a challenge.

They illustrate how Jesus, a Jewish prophet, and the apostles' established a faith that became embraced by people around the world. Jesus had demonstrated that yes, he was both human and divine, both human and the son of God. John is saying Christ's words and message are open to everybody. That, in a sense God has adopted us all. We are all his children. No matter who you are, you are already accepted. You may not understand this, because you did not know him as we did, but you can.

In today's language we'd say it's a transparent religion. There's nothing hidden behind smoke and mirrors. Imagine how novel and appealing that idea was and remains. Jesus spoke plainly, in a layman's language if you will. He was accessible. He valued and celebrated "the least amongst us." And he died for our sins and was resurrected. His vision, faith, values, and message are based on a universal love. Everyone is worthy. Anyone can be saved, but with that comes a requirement to act and live in a righteous way. This new religion of optimism and hope carried with it life affirming responsibilities.

To do sin or live a sinful life is wrong, and to benefit from God's love, you have to follow his path of casting away sin, greed, and reaching out to the least fortunate. You have to live and behave in a righteous way.

With these readings we are bearing witness to the torch being passed, and so too the message that the disciples were to reach out to strangers, people on the road – to spread out as far as wide as possible. This was not a small challenge as his disciples' world had been up to that point not much bigger than the Tri-Lakes High Peaks region and it was lorded over by Rome, that had a power over people's lives almost unimaginable. The message in Luke was go forth, get outside your comfort zone.

Jesus was into tearing down barriers. He was into empowering people. He was into connecting one on one. He is saying, don't be afraid. Being crucified didn't kill me. I am still here with you and I'll always be with you, maybe not in the flesh but you can turn to me any time. You're not alone. Don't hide in a room. Get out and connect with people.

He of course, is not just passing the torch to his disciples but to all of us. He would say to us make the time to visit people in the neighborhood house, say hello to the stranger on the sidewalk, and give of your time, skill, and treasure to help those less fortunate.

Why should we, you might ask. Jesus would answer, a purpose driven life is more rewarding, more satisfying, and more sustaining.

Taking on authority is not easy. Jesus and the disciplines faced tremendous pushback. The lives of many of them ended in a similar painful way. But they and those who joined them made a profound difference. Imagine seventeen centuries later a nation being formed with the words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights."

That is a declaration that has yet to be realized as within our country, now 242 years later, as not all people are yet treated equally. If they were we would not have voter suppression laws, women would be paid the same amount as men for the same work, laws would not benefit the 1 percent over everyone else, voting districts would not be gerrymandered to give one special interest an advantage over another, and people would not be discriminated because of the color of their skin, sex, culture, age, religion, nation of birth, income levels. I could go on.

Further, today the fate of humanity, the fate of life on earth is at risk. That risk will not be lessened if we try to sit on the sidelines and let other people carry the load. We all need to do what we can, to toss our hats in the ring if you will.

Great news is none of us are alone. Take a look at the person sitting to your right, to your left, in front of you, and behind you. We in the congregation have each other, our loved ones, and we have God's love. As Jesus said in the reading of Luke, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

As John wrote, "We are God's children now."

As John, our pastor, would say, she's got our back.

It may not seem like it today, but spring is coming. Let's go forth and plant the seeds of compassion, caring, and love and the harvest will be a society and world that's more loving and welcoming and safer for all people – safer for all God's creatures.

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