

Sermon Title: Broiled Fish & Honeycomb

Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48

Theme: Memes of resurrection (Anastasis) that inspire us to do more

The Gospel of John laments, “there are many other things that Jesus did, if every one of them were written down ... the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (Jn 21:25) Let this sink in for a minute or so. In other words, no library, no network of libraries, no network of computers, no finite space, would be large enough to include them all. It might even be part of a larger divine plan that we do not have them all. We often think that more means better, but we know that sometimes less is more. The prophet Amos held back much of what he wanted to say, “The land could not bear all the words I might have to say.” (Amos 7:10). In the same spirit, Dietrich Bonhoeffer practiced a discipline of holding his tongue. And Francis reminds us that it is possible to preach the Gospel without words.

“O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer’s praise. The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!” This is one of 6,500 hymns written by Charles Wesley in the 1700s, most are well known by church goers today. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that we might have endurance and encouragement, and thereby hope,” writes Paul. So very much was written down, and part of these writings became our Scriptures, but much more was left out, unwritten, even unsaid, and thereby not included. Paul might also have said, ‘oh but what we might benefit from what was not written down. If Paul were in the flesh today, he might lament what writings we lost or never found. ‘How could you?’ ‘How could you lose them?’ ‘Or how could you ignore the most important writings ever in such a cavalier way?’

We actually have versions of the Gospel not included in our New Testament, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Mary, even now the Gospel of Judas. And there are some gospels that we do not have, even though we know their name, such as the Gospel According to the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Ebionites (or Jewish Christians), to name a few. The reason we know of them is that parts of these are quoted in other ancient writings. Over the years, we have seen some scholars who try to deconstruct and reconstruct the gospels, some trying to put together the original source simply called “Q,” some, like Albert Schweitzer, trying to find the historical Jesus, others like the scholars of the Jesus Seminar, trying to find which sayings actually come from Jesus and which do not, which deeds are authentic and which are not. It is not from a failure of effort that we have so little when it comes to Good News! Think of this observation, however. The colorfully illustrated Book of Kells composed in Ireland around 800 CE, contains a representation of Matthew the Evangelist as a human figure (Mark-Lion, Luke-Calf, John-Eagle), and at his feet is a large book, I think, representing Matthew as a collector of gospels, a librarian if you will, preserving what exists in written form, in the ancient

spirit of the Hebrews, “the more perspectives on truth, the better, the more complete the truth is.” This is my personal take on the matter.

One of the assignments I was given at the University of Oklahoma in my Ancient Greek class was to translate a work by Xenophon entitled “*Anábasis*.” Translated from the Greek, as a verb, it means “to go up,” or “ascend,” and it tells the famous story of the military journey of 401 BCE, the March of the Ten Thousand, crossing Asia Minor and Mesopotamia to attack Persia, telling it from a soldier’s point of view. The reason I share this is that I often use this word “*Anábasis*” to remind me how to pronounce another Greek word, “*Anástasis*.” Translated, again as a verb, this latter word means “to rise up,” the noun meaning “resurrection.” There are shades of difference depending upon whether you are translating Attic Greek (i.e. classical Greek) or *Koine* Greek (Common people’s Greek, or New Testament Greek). And context is important, as the word can mean “rising from a seated position” or “rising from the dead,” or a “future resurrection.” Anastasia is a popular name today expressing the same idea, hope, renewal, and new beginnings. Another rather interesting meaning for this term is used in Hebrews 11:35, “women received their dead by resurrection,” and those who resisting oppression to the end, did so to obtain a “better resurrection.” One of our Disciples’ missionaries to Guatemala, Gloria Vicente, spoke to a group of us in Smith Center, Kansas in 2016, describing how the women in Guatemala interpreted this verse from Hebrews 11, having lost their husbands and fathers in the Civil War in Guatemala, and not knowing where they were buried, or even if they were buried. She explained that these women received their dead “by resurrection,” without the closure they would have preferred, certainly, but also through their protests to the government to find out where the bodies were so that they could relocate them home to their families. In their reading of this Scripture, there was a connection between protest and resurrection, receiving their dead for re-burial or burial as the case might be, even holding out for a better resurrection, as the Scripture proclaims.

The black poet, Maya Angelou, writes: “Still I rise,” Just like moons and like suns, with the certainty of tides, just like hopes springing high, Still I’ll rise.” “We will rise,” says Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman, “the new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it.”

Matthew and Luke share the same metaphor when it comes to Light:

“The eye is the body’s lamp. It follows if your eye is clear, your whole body will be flooded with light. If your eye is hazy, then your body will also be darkened (*skoteinos*) to that extent. Therefore, consider whether the light in you is not darkness [instead], and if darkness, how great is that darkness (*skotos*)? (Lk. 11:34-36; Matt. 6:22-23)

Margaret Ellen Lee and Bernard Brandon Scott offer a compelling new thesis in their latest publication, that sound mapping and analysis can perform a critical role in interpretation of

New Testament, restoring its “living voice.”¹ When we neglect the “soundscape”² of the New Testament, Margaret Lee writes, “our exegesis remains incomplete at best and misguided at worst,” ... like an opera’s *libretto*, incomplete until animated by the human voice.”³ In the words of Jeffrey Brickle, she writes, “sound mapping allows an interpreter to analyze sounds we can see.”⁴ Using their sound mapping technique with the resurrection story in John, chapter 20, leads to some interesting new conclusions:

The sound of the text creates the image of Jesus standing, not only among the disciples, but also among us, the audience, the reader. Jesus is standing, waiting to be recognized in the listening space. Voice, like breath, is a model for spirit, unseen, but having body nonetheless. Sight follows voice and sound. Mary hears the savior’s voice before recognizing him, hearing first, seeing second. And the sound does not tell us that Mary was forbidden to touch Jesus while Thomas was not so forbidden, as if men were more worthy of touching Jesus before his ascent into heaven. No, the sound indicates something far different. The meaning is not “don’t touch me,” but instead “don’t cling to me.” The sound shows that Thomas’ confession is not a climax but one in a series of examples of coming to faith. Mary comes to faith by hearing Jesus’ voice, Thomas comes to faith by hearing the invitation of Jesus to see and to touch him. Faith, both for Mary and Thomas, and for us, comes through hearing the gospel. What an wonderful way of understanding the ‘living voice’ of resurrection!

So, the witnesses of Jesus bear testimony using a rich and colorful language that is meaningful to those who hear them or can visualize them. They put him to death on a tree, says Paul, “from a lynching curse (Dt. 21:22-3), Christ has redeemed us from the curse by becoming himself a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). This is the same hyperbolic language as the text “Jesus, who knew no sin, has become sin itself (2 Cor 5:21) for us. In Christ, Death has died! It is as colorful a language as the one from Ephesians, Christ has captured captivity, Christ has conquered hostility and hatred, yea, even death itself. It doesn’t have the meaning of conquering violence with violence, as some would critically suggest, but instead the meaning that dispels violence with non-violence. This is the Celtic Christ going before us, behind us, above us, below us, to the right of us, to the left of us, the alpha and omega, first and last.

¹ Margaret Ellen Lee, ed. *Sound Matters: New Testament Studies in Sound Mapping* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Cascade Books, 2018), 133, Kindle.

² Lee, *Sound Matters*, 290, Kindle.

³ Lee, *Sound Matters*, 290, Kindle.

⁴ Lee, *Sound Matters*, 167, Kindle.

And Jesus appeared to those chosen as witnesses, eating and drinking with them after he has been raised from the dead. This is the proof of resurrection that we see in John's tradition. The disciples ask: 'Where are the signs, so we can believe?' And Jesus suggests a simple test: "give me some food to eat and I will eat it in front of you; they found a broiled fish, (and some honeycomb, as one source adds). The proof is that even if a ghost (disembodied spirit) might eat of the honeycomb in various legends, the ghost could not eat broiled fish. (Jn. 20:24-29; 1 Jn 1:1). The addition of "honeycomb" to the text follows a note by the scholar G. D. Kilpatrick that, in extra-biblical texts, "honeycomb" is considered a "food of immortality," while broiled fish is a food of mortality.

Now, to be sure, the word "honeycomb" is an interpolation of the text (Bruce Metzger), but it is one that Reformation theologians, like John Calvin, embraced. "Christ really tasted the fish and the honeycomb, in order to show that he was really a man, so we cannot doubt that by his divine power he consumed what was not needed to pass into nourishment." Calvin goes on to say that all words are wasted until we have received the Holy Spirit and the gift of understanding.

When the risen Jesus eats the broiled fish and the honeycomb, he is eating of the food of mortality and immortality at the same time. He has a resurrected body that the disciples can recognize from having known him in the flesh, but he also has a spiritual body that they can only recognize with the eyes of the Holy Spirit. Luke does not take Jesus out of the world. Instead, he places the Risen Christ right back into the world. "See my hands and feet and touch me." I still have my scars as proof! Touch my side! Feel the nail prints in my hands and feet! This flesh and blood life is where God is active and alive. The Resurrected body is a scar-marked body! Where Paul says "I bear the stigmata, the scar-marks, of Jesus in my own body, the Risen Jesus says: "Live in me as I live in you."

Rome has sometimes been called the "Eternal City," because its buildings never seem to crumble or crack over many centuries of existence. Concrete structures like the Colosseum continue to stand tall without breaking up. Modern concrete pales drastically beside this ancient concrete. 'It's the white chunks inside the concrete,' the scholars now say. Ancient concrete has a mystery ingredient that has allowed it to stand over 2,000 years. These 'white chunks' are called lime clasts. The lime clasts dissolve into cracks and recrystallize after being exposed to water. They give the concrete the ability to heal its own cracks. These lime clasts, as they are called, arise because of quicklime (calcium oxide), and are formed under extreme temperatures (hot-mixing).

I would suggest that our witness can also become 'eternal' in this sense of the word. Our message is an eternity embodied/incarnated in lived testimony. It is eternal resurrection living on the edge of chaos and danger. Our quicklime is hot-mixed in Jesus, the healing of God, mixed into the sin of the world. Jesus, who knew no sin, is made into sin itself, the curse made into the

curse itself, the ancient symbol of Nechustan into the healing pole of Christ, eternal life made into death itself, and we are redeemed from all of this through the quicklime of Jesus. The Christ is the unleavened placed inside the leaven, to redeem it, the pure placed within the impure to save it, the innocence placed within the guilty to heal it. The steadfast loyalty/faithfulness is placed within the betrayed to reconcile and give birth to new life, born-from-above life, in the here and now. The Word on our lips and in our hearts, not in some universe light years away.

These witnesses are given courage, through divine energy and power (dynamo) to be witnesses for healing and forgiveness throughout the world. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) The purpose is healing (the pole), the purpose is forgiveness (the tree), the purpose is redemption (the cross) through the story of God’s love for each of us. God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit to preach peace and to stand against oppression. God has anointed him to bring an impartial justice to all the nations, Jewish and Gentile alike. The gift of the Holy Spirit goes beyond language and ethnicity to give us healing words of love. Alleluia! Amen.