

Sunday April 14, 2024

FIRST LESSON: Psalm 139: 13–14

GOSPEL READING: Luke 24: 36b–48

Sermon Series: Becoming: Faithful

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We are continuing with our Becoming Sermon Series which is a series designed to take us on a 50 day journey towards Pentecost that equates to be exactly 7 Sundays between Easter and Holy Pentecost which lands on May 19, 2024 this year.

- This week our emphasis of “becoming,” will be centered on the topic of faithfulness.
- To ensure that we are all on the same page regarding this topic of faithfulness, let’s begin to explore some definitions.
- The online dictionary definition of faithful presents two definitions for us to consider.
- **The first definition of faithful** is remaining loyal and steadfast.

- When applying this first definition, I think about a person perhaps being faithful to their career.
- Many of us in our congregation have been fortunate enough to be retired from a myriad of professions such as teachers, professors, veterinarians, accountants and more.
- Therefore, it is in this retirement, that it can be said that part of the significance of this accomplishment is to acknowledge that a person has been faithful to the principles and values of their profession.
- For some of us have put in 20, 30 and possibly 40 years into our careers, all which reveals a measure of loyalty and steadfastness.
- **The second definition** that the online dictionary presents, defines faithfulness as being true to the facts of the original.
- This second definition can be applied to a person, place or thing where for instance, the Steiff teddy bear that I preached about on Easter morning is designed true to the original fashion and process that Margarete Steiff the founder applied in the early 1900s.

- **This definition of faithfulness** can apply to those who are faithful to a particular religion or political party.
- **This definition of faithfulness** certainly applies to the people of Lincoln First United Methodist Church, who have remained faithful members of this historic Church in all of her transitions and traditions.
- **It is a measure of faithfulness** that ensures that the Church thrives and succeeds for many years until thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.
- Looking at the biblical and spiritual definition of what it means to be faithful contains many of the elements that we have talked about with some unique specifications and criteria.
- **In a spiritual context, being faithful** often extends beyond mere loyalty or reliability.
- It involves a deep trust in a higher power, a divine presence, or a set of spiritual principles.
- Faithfulness in this sense encompasses an unwavering belief, commitment, and devotion to one's spiritual path or religious beliefs.

- Faithfulness with this understanding implies a profound sense of connection and surrender to the divine, even in the face of challenges, doubts, or uncertainties.
- Being faithful spiritually often involves living in alignment with one's beliefs, seeking to cultivate virtues such as compassion, kindness, and integrity, and trusting in the ultimate goodness and wisdom of the universe or the divine.
- Therefore why this sermon is naming that faithfulness is something for us to become is because I don't know about you, but I have sometimes fallen short in achieving this level of faithfulness in all regards that we have talked about.
- Sometimes I have fallen short of being a faithful friend, family member, leader and follower of Christ.
- This is not just my personal confession, this indeed ought to be humanity's confession.
- For in peering a little closer to this theme of faithfulness – a quality deeply ingrained in the teachings of our faith traditions, I stopped by to name that humanity has often

struggled to uphold being faithful in our relationships with community, spirituality, and families.

- Throughout history, we've witnessed moments of great unity and solidarity within communities, moments when the bonds of fellowship seemed unbreakable.
- Yet, we've also witnessed times when those bonds faltered, when selfishness, greed, and division clouded our vision and led us astray.
- Sometimes in our pursuit of material wealth and individual success, we've sometimes forgotten the importance of caring for our neighbors, of lifting each other up in times of need.
- We've allowed economic disparities to widen, leaving behind those who are marginalized and vulnerable, fracturing the very fabric of our communities.
- Similarly, in our spiritual journey, we've encountered moments of profound connection and enlightenment, moments when the presence of the divine felt palpable in our hearts and minds.
- Yet, we've also faced times of doubt and disbelief, when our faith wavered in the face of adversity, when we

questioned the very existence of that which we hold sacred.

- We've sometimes strayed from the path of righteousness, succumbing to temptation and sin, forgetting the teachings of love, compassion, and forgiveness that lie at the core of our spiritual traditions.
- We've allowed dogma and division to separate us from one another, failing to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every human soul.
- Within our families, the sacred bonds of kinship and love that should bind us together have sometimes been strained by conflict, by misunderstandings, by neglect.
- Sometimes we have failed to prioritize the well-being of our loved ones, to nurture those relationships with the care and devotion they deserve.
- All of this and more is what I imagine is occurring in our gospel this morning with these disciples.
- In the Gospel of Luke, this passage occurs immediately after the account of Jesus' resurrection

and the encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35).

- In this narrative, two disciples are walking to Emmaus when Jesus appears to them, but they do not recognize him until he breaks bread with them.
- I invited our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to life class within this story to really step into these disciples shoes as if it were their own shoes in this encounter of Jesus.
- As a result, some of the students remarked how they would have feelings of fear and doubt, even though Jesus is prescribing peace to the situation, which echoes the dispels feelings in verse 37 that stated that *They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.* .
- This idea of ghosts being mentioned did raise more questions in our Wednesday class where some wanted to understand the significance of ghost if any within this historical context.
- In researching I learned that the concept of ghosts or spirits appears in various forms throughout the Bible,

and their significance varies depending on the context and interpretation.

- **In the Old Testament**, there are references to spirits or ghosts, often associated with the realm of the dead or the afterlife.
- For example, in the book of 1 Samuel, King Saul consults a medium to summon the spirit of the prophet Samuel, who had died.
- **In the New Testament**, there are also references to spirits or ghosts, particularly in accounts of Jesus' ministry.
- For instance, Jesus' disciples initially thought he was a ghost when they saw him walking on water (Matthew 14:26, Mark 6:49).
- Jesus reassures them and demonstrates his power over the natural and supernatural realms.
- Overall, the significance of ghosts in the Bible is often tied to broader theological themes such as the afterlife, divine judgment, and the power of God.
- Understanding the background and role that ghosts played in the New Testament, opens up another

consideration that this sermon has been naming all along—that actually connects with the theme preached last week on **what it means to become vulnerable**.

- For part of the fear coming from the disciples **could have been** the simple shock of seeing Jesus as fully resurrected—although Jesus has prophesied this concept to them time and time again.
- However, in light of understanding that ghosts in this sense reveals the power of God and all of God's wisdom and knowledge to be able to really see us—just as clear as God saw Adam and Eve naked in the garden in which at this revelation they immediately tried to hide behind fig leaves—(story is found in Genesis 3);
- This could explain what was implicitly rattling the disciples cage on that day—
- To summarize all of this into one simple sentence—in the disciples naming Jesus to be a ghost, means that on some level, they understood that they were indeed

in a spiritual and divine moment where Jesus could really see them.

- **Jesus could see** every aspect of their hearts—
- **Jesus could see** the good, the bad, and the ugly of all of their thoughts.
- **Jesus could see** their doubts, their insecurities, their transgressions and shortcomings.
- **Jesus could fully see it all** leading Jesus to say to them in verses 38-39 "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

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."

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

- The disciples at this point in my biblical imagination is still oscillating in their thoughts between the Old Testament and New Testament understanding of ghosts which is revealed in the first portion of vs 41 that says *While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering;*

- They were cautiously joyful— **yet disbelieving and still wondering** how someone who could fully see them and find them to be wonderfully complex at the same time.
- They were cautiously joyful-**yet disbelieving and still wondering** how someone who could fully know them and still claim them to be an imperfect, perfect workmanship of the Great Divine.
- Jesus still seeing this all, asked the disciples in the second part of vs 41— "Have you anything here to eat?"
- **42** They gave him a piece of broiled fish,
- **43** and he took it and ate in their presence.
- Our Wednesday class, remarked how this gesture of Jesus is something that we typically do in Church culture today....**we eat....and we typically eat really well.**
- Every First Sunday, we come to the Holy table and feast in the Eucharist- as we consume the bread of life and cup of God's love that acknowledges our togetherness as a community that has fallen, that

remembers and celebrates that we are forgiven and loved by the Holy One who calls us to press on in our prayers, presence, gifts service and witness —to be the renewed hands and feet of the world.

- **We eat** even in the midst of our shortcomings and setbacks, because there is something just transformational in the act of community surrounding an open table that allows us to share our highs and lows of our life journeys.
- **We eat** with gratitude as we acknowledge that even in the struggles of life, God still provides us all a measure of sustenance that equips us to keep on keeping on.
- **It is often in this act of simply coming together to eat**, that begins to open our minds with a new level of understanding of what it means to become faithful in our work together.
- For faithfulness is not a destination but a journey, a daily commitment to strive for greater understanding, greater compassion, greater unity.

- It is a call to action, a call to build bridges instead of walls, to extend a hand of friendship to those in need, to cultivate a spirit of generosity and kindness in all that we do.
- As we look to the future, let us recommit ourselves to the values that unite us as a community, as spiritual seekers, as families bound together by love.
- Let us seek forgiveness for our past transgressions and embrace the opportunity for renewal and redemption.
- And let us remember that it is through our faithfulness – to one another, to our spiritual path, to our families – that often starts with a wholesome meal and a conversation, that we can truly fulfill our purpose and bring light into the world.
- Let the Church say Amen!