

Gethsemane Lutheran Church

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Lectionary Bible Study for Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:36-48

“You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:48 NRSV)

Our readings during the Easter Season invite us to witness the encounters the disciples have with Jesus after his resurrection. In our lectionary reading this week from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appears to the disciples and eats with them. Earlier in this chapter (Luke 24), Jesus walked the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus with two of his disciples. **They don’t recognize him!** After they arrive at Emmaus, Jesus sits with them for a meal. Jesus takes bread, blesses it and breaks it. Finally, in the breaking of bread, their eyes are opened and they recognize him, but he vanishes from their presence.

With great excitement (and probably a little fear!), the disciples return the seven miles to Jerusalem to tell the others about what they had witnessed. It is while these disciples are telling the others about the events on the way to Emmaus that Jesus stands among them. Jesus greets them, “Peace be with you.” (Luke 24:36). Despite the testimonies of Mary and the two disciples who walk with Jesus, the disciples are terrified. They think they are looking at a ghost!

Would we recognize Jesus if he appeared among us today?

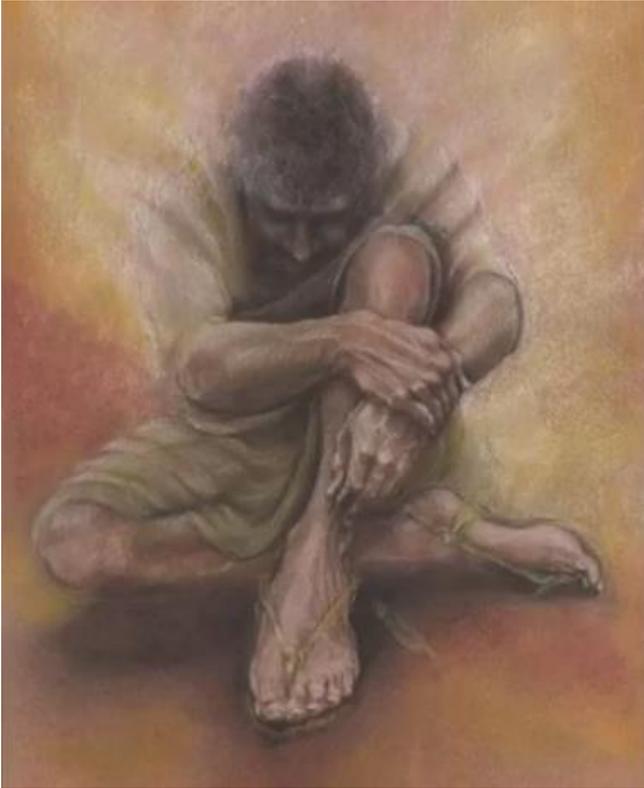
Like many of you, I grew up with an image of Jesus that was pale-skinned, blue-eyed, blonde-haired. But the scriptures tell us that Jesus was a Jew, born around 4 B.C. in Bethlehem, and lived in Egypt as a child for a short time before moving to Nazareth.

In her book, [What Did Jesus Look Like](#), Professor Joan E. Taylor explores what Jesus looked like. After consulting with experts on ancient skeletons in Israel, Prof. Taylor learned that Judeans of the first century were closest biologically to Iraqi Jews of the contemporary world. **Jesus most likely had deep brown eyes, dark brown to black hair and olive-brown skin.** He may have stood about 5-ft.-5-in. tall, the average man’s height at the time. Jesus is portrayed in the gospels as a carpenter who did a lot of walking but at times didn’t have much to eat. This active lifestyle, but lack of regular food, meant that he was probably thin.

So if Jesus appeared to us today, we would see a man of Middle Eastern appearance, with scruffy, shortish hair and beard, wearing very basic clothing: a knee-length, thin, one-piece tunic and an undyed mantle.

How would we respond if we saw a man who looked like this suddenly appear in our living room? In the grocery store? On the street? Would WE recognize Jesus?

We live in a time when brown skin is a target for hatred. People of color, people who look like Jesus, experience the violence of racism. We read the news and know that within our city, too, people are marginalized and treated differently because of the color of their skin.



A portrait of Jesus as imagined by Joan Taylor, by Cathy Fisher.

When Jesus appears among the disciples, he invites them to touch him and feel his wounds. He still is made of bone and flesh. Jesus takes food and eats it. The disciples are filled with “joy in their disbelieving and wondering” (Luke 24:41). Now they must know that he is truly ALIVE and among them.

Just like on the path to Emmaus, Jesus begins to teach them about the scriptures, but in a new way, identifying himself as the fulfillment of all that had been written. Finally, their minds are opened and they understand.

Now that the disciples have witnessed the resurrected Christ, they are commissioned by Jesus to go and tell others. “You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:48).

What have you seen this week? What are you a witness to?

We do not have the opportunity to physically touch the hands and feet of Jesus, nor to watch him eat food. Yet the Holy Spirit is still at work, opening our minds, spirits and hearts to walk the path of discipleship by faith. It is the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers and enlightens us. Our life of faith proclaims that all people are made in the image of God, deeply beloved, and worthy of belonging. The Holy Spirit nudges and empowers us to be a vibrant witness to Christ’s calling to all people.

Holy One, may I see Christ in my neighbor, in the stranger, and in the world. Help me to recognize you when you appear. Open my heart to hear your voice this week. Guide me as I seek to follow you in bringing your kingdom of justice, mercy and peace to this world. Amen.