

Easter 3 (B)
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Text: Luke 24:36b-48

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When I was in 4th grade, I got a new baseball mitt. It was great—it had that new leather smell, there was a strap you could adjust for the position of your thumb, and it had a nice, deep pocket. There was only one problem with it, though. It was new. And it had that “new mitt” shape to it—like “that.” I’d stick the mitt out there to catch the ball, but it wouldn’t open all the way easily, so the ball would bounce off the side of the glove. Or if the ball went into the glove, it would bounce right out, because the mitt wouldn’t close down around the ball. It was like trying to catch with a glove made of cement.

So I set about breaking it in, to make it more receptive, and I did everything to it I could think of. I oiled the leather. I’d fold it closed and sit on it while I was watching TV. I’d pull it open as wide as it would go and stretch it. I’d work it—open, close, open, close. And by the time Little League was ready to start, it was ready. I remember one of the first games of the season. I was in the outfield, and the batter hit a booming, high shot. I drifted back, I held up my mitt, and I could feel ball pop down into the pocket. My mitt closed smoothly around the ball. It was the third out, so I threw the ball back to the infield and ran to the dugout, where my friends slapped me on the back and said, “Good catch!”

The question at work behind our gospel story for this morning is whether the disciples would ever to be able to catch what God was up to through Jesus. Their minds were firmly shaped around the idea that Jesus would be the sort of leader that King David was, that he would restore the nation of Israel to a position of power and glory—a position they would be entitled to share, of course. But then Jesus was betrayed and condemned and put to death, and there was no room in their minds for anything like that.

So on the evening of Easter day, after the women had gone to the tomb and found it empty, after reports by some that they had seen Jesus alive, Luke tells how Jesus appeared among the disciples and said, “Peace be with you.” They were terrified. Knowing that death is not a temporary condition, they were sure they were seeing a ghost. So Jesus tried everything he could to get them to see—he showed them his hands and feet. Surely seeing the marks of the nails would convince them that it was really him. Luke says they were happy to see him, they were full of joy, but they were also disbelieving and wondering. They were confused, because there wasn’t any place in their thinking for God to work through suffering and death. So Jesus asked for something to eat—to show them he wasn’t a ghost. They gave him a piece of fish, and he ate it.

Finally, Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures, to give them a vision for what God is up to, what God has always been up to, so they can set aside all of the false expectations that were getting in their way. At last they can receive this new and surprising work that God is up to—to break the power of sin and death, and to bring healing and wholeness to the entire human family, and draw every person into the loving embrace of God. At last, all that Jesus has said and done can sink deeply into their hearts and minds. They can receive the gift God is giving and hold it close.

Then Jesus tells the disciples, you are witnesses of these things. As the message of Jesus and his victory over death goes out, beginning from Jerusalem, and going to all nations, they will be the ones to carry it. As the power of forgiveness renews relationships and heals communities, they will be the ones to share it. As God is overcoming fear and guilt and grief and creating communities of peace and wholeness, it will be through them and through their witness that God will be working. Now, at last, they can see and recognize what God is up to—and it happens as Jesus speaks to them through the scriptures, and catches them up into God's work of love and healing by sending them out as witnesses.

It's not hard, sometimes, to see ourselves in the place of the disciples, to wonder whether we'll ever catch what God is up to. We come to Jesus with all sorts of expectations. We come with hopes and fears, with our worries and our overly busy lives. We come with our questions and our wondering. And Jesus speaks to us through the scriptures, and catches us up into God's great work of love and healing.

That's what is happening to us right here, right now, as we share in worship. It's what happens as we read the Bible and pray. It's what is happening when we share this journey of faith with other Christians, when we work and serve together, when we support and care for each other. Jesus is opening our hearts and minds so that we can catch what God is doing. Jesus is reshaping our expectations so that we can receive the gift God has for us. There are all sorts of expectations we might have—about what our life ought to be like, about what God should be doing, or should have done. But those expectations really don't do much besides get in the way, and prevent us from receiving the gifts God is giving—gifts of hope and joy and peace. Our lives are like that brand new baseball mitt, and Jesus needs to open us up to catch the life God is giving, the life that we were meant to live.

And just like the disciples, it's as we are sent out as witnesses that we catch everything God is giving, and we are witnesses with our whole lives. We don't catch the gifts of God just by coming to church on a Sunday morning. Instead, God's gift of forgiveness works its way deeply into our lives as we are learning to forgive others—neighbors, family, or friends. We experience God's overflow-

ing goodness as we nurture thankfulness and gratitude and generosity as our joyful response to God. The love of God becomes more and more real to us as we seek to act with compassion, to recognize every neighbor as a fellow-traveler in life. In all of these ways, and more, God is at work to refashion our lives, to open our hearts to receive every good gift God is giving. Thanks be to God.
Amen