

Acts 3:12-19
Psalm 4
1 John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36b-48

Sermon April 14th, 2024

The Tangibles Connecting Us to the Intangibles of Our Faith

There are very few of us who feel empowered by the intangibles of our faith alone to live faithful lives. For example, there is a difference between someone sharing a platitude or a theological thought with us in a card when we are grieving to help us keep the faith versus someone being physically present. Holding our hand. Praying with us. Sharing in the gift of communion with us.

As much as we appreciate the cards we receive. As much as those sayings and platitudes can sound comforting to us. These alone don't seem to empower us to keep the faith as much as the people who walk with us in our grief do. Those who sit with us and listen to us as we lament. Those who pray with us as we try to hear God's comforting voice. Those who share in the gift of communion with us as we fight the urge to isolate ourselves, trying to stay connected to our community.

As spiritual people who often focus on the intangibles, the theological doctrines of our faith tradition, the aspects of the spiritual world that we cannot touch or easily explain. We find ourselves needing to take our theologies, these aspects of the spiritual world, these things we cannot explain, and find something tangible that helps us physically connect with these intangibles.

For example, water in the practice of baptism helps us physically connect with our theological principles of God's grace and love. We believe we are spiritually cleansed by these waters. We are welcomed into the community of believers by these waters. We are empowered by these waters to live our lives like Christ.

Bread and wine/grape juice in the practice of communion helps us physically connect with our theological principles of Christ's real presence, God's mercy, God's renewing love, and God's hospitality. As Lutherans, we believe in the moment we take and eat the body and blood of our savior Jesus Christ that we are experiencing the real presence of Christ. We are experiencing God's forgiving love. We are experiencing God's radical hospitality. We are being connected with Christians in all times and in all places. And we are empowered through the body and blood, these physical elements, of bread and wine/grape juice to go out in the world and be Christ's hands and feet in it.

We anoint people with oil in our healing rites to physically connect them to God's healing power.

We use rings in marriage as a physical sign of their commitment to each other, as well as, their commitment as a couple to their creator.

In some Christian traditions we use prayer shawls or a rosary to help us physically connect with God when we pray.

And though the Word of God was an oral tradition for much of history. Since the invention of the printing press, we have taken this word and put it down in a physical book that we can touch. That we can see.

So, as much as our Christian tradition is filled with intangible beliefs, we rely heavily on tangible things to connect us to these intangible beliefs. So, to, feel empowered to live out our faith in the world.

Likewise, the disciples need something tangible to feel connected to the resurrected Christ. Initially, he is a ghost to them. Someone who travels through walls and closed doors. Someone who is still dead.

Jesus then invites the disciples to touch him, to touch his wounds. And then goes on to eat a meal with them to show them that Jesus isn't a ghost, but has been physically resurrected from the dead. Or in other words, the resurrected Christ is a tangible reality.

This belief that the resurrected Christ wasn't just some intangible reality, but someone tangible, that they could eat and drink with. Someone they could touch. Someone who still had the marks of his crucifixion on his hands and legs. Was what really empowered the disciples and early believers to keep being the church in the world. To keep living out Christ' teachings. Even in the face of persecution.

And so, even in a world where the intangibles were much easier to believe and accept, they needed the tangibles to feel empowered to keep this movement going.

Like us, who feel empowered to keep this movement going even with all the challenges we face. Who feel empowered to keep this movement going whenever we open up our bibles and read. Whenever we come to the table and experience the real presence of Christ in the bread and the wine/grape juice. Whenever we experience the waters of baptism. Whenever someone holds our hand as we grieve. Whenever we receive oil on our foreheads in the sign of the cross as a sign of God's healing. Whenever we take out our prayer shawl or rosary. Whenever we wear our rings.

We are empowered to keep Jesus' movement going when we experience the tangibles of our faith. When we experience Christ's real presence.

Let us pray, gracious God, when we struggle to live out our faith in the world, empower us through Christ's real presence to keep the faith. To keep the movement going. To be Christ's hands and feet in the world. **Amen.**

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