

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**

**Third Sunday of Easter – April 15, 2018**

**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Luke 24:36b-48**

**FOR REFLECTION**

**“Nothing makes it easier to resist temptation than a proper bringing-up, a sound set of values - and witnesses.”**

~ Franklin P. Jones, American Journalist (1908-1980)

**“The writer isn't made in a vacuum. Writers are witnesses. The reason we need writers is because we need witnesses to this terrifying century.”**

~ E. L. Doctorow, American Author (1931-2015)

**The Job of Witnessing**

In the common lectionary, the Season of Lent had us follow Jesus and the disciples on their journey through the eyes of the gospel writer John. Easter Sunday was also John's version – with the women being witnesses to the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene the first witness to the risen Christ.

For some reason, the Third Sunday of Easter has thrown us over into Luke – the point of view of the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Our passage is all but 5 verses of the end of the book – which mirrors Acts in multiple ways. Luke's words on the lips of Jesus declare that recent events occurred as a result of predictions made in the Law, Prophets and Psalms – in other words, it was destiny.

Jesus's declaration that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, **beginning from Jerusalem...**” is what John the Baptist proclaimed in Luke 3:3-7. And the geographical outline in Acts 1:8 – with the gospel **beginning in Jerusalem** and then proceeding to all Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth – is the plan of the Book of Acts.

This is Luke connecting the dots in his narrative about the beginnings of a new faith – rooted in Judaism but open to all people.

In Luke's gospel, the women find the tomb empty – go tell the disciples – and the disciples dismiss the story as nonsense. (In spite of women being included as disciples and equals in the movement, they are dismissed as official witnesses per the culture of the time.) Peter goes and peeks into the tomb to verify the story and is then satisfied it is true. Luke follows up with the story of Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Those two disciples (likely a man and a woman) go back to Jerusalem, tell the rest of the disciples what THEY witnessed – and as they are relating the tale – Jesus appears again. The disciples think they are seeing a ghost – so Jesus realizes he has to prove that he is real by allowing them to touch him – and then by eating something. Apparently, if you eat – you’re alive. [Which, of course, calls to mind “Tommy” the rock opera by The Who and their refrain, “See me, feel me, touch me, heal me....” Non sequitur, I know.]

Luke’s opera, I mean gospel, and book about the actions of the disciples, is a literary work of art – story-telling at its best. It is at the foundation of the religion we profess to follow – however progressively or retrogressively we think about it. And the main message of this text, as I interpret it, is that we – as latter-day disciples – are witnesses. And, as witnesses, we have a job to do. But what, in heaven’s name, is the job description? I’ll bet you that a Jehovah’s Witness will tell you what they think it is.

What do witnesses do in our branch of Christianity? (Discussion)

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- Xxx
- Xxx
- Xxx
- Xxx
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If any of you watch Channel 7 ABC Eyewitness News, you will have heard the voice-over guy, Bill Ratner, say, “WE ARE ALL **EYE-WITNESSES.**”

You’ve heard recent law-enforcement bodies encourage us with the words, “If you **see** something, say something.” This is the first line of self-defense against terrorists on our streets and in our airports.

**The word “wit-ness” comes from Old English – the word “wit” meaning “see.”** A witness is first and foremost a “See-er.” The word “eye-witness” refers to sight as the main sense used in remembering what one has experienced:

**Eyewitness memory is a person's episodic memory for a crime or other dramatic event that he or she has witnessed.** Eyewitness testimony is often relied upon in the judicial system. It can also refer to an individual's memory for a face, where they are required to remember the face of their perpetrator, for example.

**However, the accuracy of eyewitness memories is sometimes questioned because there are many factors that can act during encoding and retrieval of the witnessed event which may adversely affect the creation and maintenance of the memory for the event. Experts have found evidence to suggest that eyewitness memory is fallible. It has long been**

**speculated that mistaken eyewitness identification plays a major role in the wrongful conviction of innocent individuals.**

A growing body of research now supports this speculation, indicating that mistaken eyewitness identification is responsible for more convictions of the innocent than all other factors combined. **This may be due to the fact that details of unpleasant emotional events are recalled poorly compared to neutral events. States of high emotional arousal, which occur during a stressful or traumatic event, lead to less efficient memory processing.**

The Innocence Project determined that 75% of the 239 DNA exoneration cases had occurred due to inaccurate eyewitness testimony. It is important to inform the public about the flawed nature of eyewitness memory and the difficulties relating to its use in the criminal justice system so that **eyewitness accounts are [currently] not viewed as the absolute truth.**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eyewitness\\_memory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eyewitness_memory)

This, of course, was not the understanding when Luke was writing his books. Witnesses were the main truth-tellers and evidence of the reality of events. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner tells us that the Hebrew word *eh-met* has several meanings – two of which are “Vision” and “Truth.” He writes:

Reality may be read through an infinity of lenses. Each refraction carries its own unique bias...

We [also] suspect there is an absolute truth and that it is mysteriously connected to what some people call “God.” God is not truth but standing in God’s presence may be. How matters appear to God, that is true.

We choose our truth by the scope of our vision. To see beyond the present and beyond the end of our allotted days is to understand why we have been created...To comprehend our intended task is our only shot at glimpsing what is enduring and absolutely true. Without the long-range lens, nothing is false, but nothing is true either...

A fact is always the same. Once you learn it, you have it forever. But truth is different. Once you understand it, you are forever changed and “the truth” disappears. And because you are now someone else, you must learn it all over again.

Lawrence Kushner, The Book of Words pp.115-16

To tie this all together, let’s try to develop that “job-description” for “witnessing” in these times – when eye-witnesses are considered fallible, our leaders are untethered from the “truth” – and our faith tradition has a bad reputation for trying to convert people by witnessing to a version of reality that isn’t necessarily real or true or Godly.

What do we need to consciously do to fulfill our role as witnesses?

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- Xxx

- xxx
- Keep our eyes on the long-view
- Use more of our senses? Tools? Skills?
- Tally the actual facts (and name the alternative facts)
- Call liars and short-sighted leaders to accountability
- Raise children who can see beyond their own navels
- Follow the money and champion the causes of those who have less or none
- Stand up on the “wall” where we can see further – be watch-people – call out what is coming and warn people of danger
- As Christians, keep our eyes on the person of Jesus, what he did, whose side he was on, and strive to act in accordance with his apparent value system
- Xxx
- Xxx

One of our discoveries at the retreat last weekend was that a component of True Community is a commitment to the Truth and honesty. As we work on our Community Behavioral Covenant in the next month or two, let’s look more closely at what that means for us at Mt. Hollywood UCC.

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**Scripture Reading for Sunday April 15, 2018 – Easter 3 – Year B**

**Luke 24:36b-48**

36b While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "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.

41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "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. 44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48 You are witnesses of these things.**"

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## **wit-ness 'witnəs**

noun: witness; plural noun: witnesses

**1.** a person who sees an event, typically a crime or accident, take place.

"police are appealing for witnesses to the accident"

**synonyms: observer, onlooker, eyewitness, spectator, viewer, watcher;** More

a person giving sworn testimony to a court of law or the police.

synonyms: deponent, testifier

"she cross-examined the witness"

a person who is present at the signing of a document and signs it themselves to confirm this.

**2.** evidence; proof.

"the memorial service was witness to the wide circle of his interest"

used to refer to confirmation or evidence given by signature, under oath, or otherwise.

"in witness thereof, the parties sign this document"

open profession of one's religious faith through words or actions.

**3.** a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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verb: witness; 3rd person present: witnesses; past tense: witnessed; past participle: witnessed;

gerund or present participle: witnessing

see (an event, typically a crime or accident) take place.

"a bartender who witnessed the murder"

**synonyms: see, observe, watch, view, notice, spot;**

Have knowledge of (an event or change) from personal observation or experience.

"what we are witnessing is the birth of a dangerously liberal orthodoxy"

**synonyms: undergo, experience, go through, see;**

(of a time, place, or other context) be the setting in which (an event or development) takes place.

"the 1980s witnessed an unprecedented increase in the scope of the electronic media"

be present as someone signs (a document) or gives (their signature) to a document and sign it oneself to confirm this.

"the clerk witnessed her signature"

**synonyms: countersign, sign, endorse, validate; notarize**

"the will is correctly witnessed"

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**1.** look at (used to introduce a fact illustrating a preceding statement).

"the nuclear family is a vulnerable institution—witness the rates of marital breakdown"

**2.** give or serve as evidence of; testify to.

"his writings witness to an inner toughness"

**3.** (of a person) openly profess one's religious faith.

"our duty is to witness to God"

**Origin:** Old English *witnes* (see *wit1*, *-ness*)

[https://www.google.com/search?source=hp&ei=ZgrSWtjCBsjmsAW2-7LQBA&q=witness&oq=witness&gs\\_l=psy-ab.1.0.0i67k112j0i67k1j0i5j0i67k1.1713.6534.0.7470.10.8.1.0.0.0.268.840.0j4j1.5.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..4.6.851.0..35j39k1j0i131k1j0i131i67k1.0.YD-\\_b61xJ5o](https://www.google.com/search?source=hp&ei=ZgrSWtjCBsjmsAW2-7LQBA&q=witness&oq=witness&gs_l=psy-ab.1.0.0i67k112j0i67k1j0i5j0i67k1.1713.6534.0.7470.10.8.1.0.0.0.268.840.0j4j1.5.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..4.6.851.0..35j39k1j0i131k1j0i131i67k1.0.YD-_b61xJ5o)