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*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA*  
*Third Sunday after Easter*  
*April 18, 2021*  
*Acts 3:12-19; Ps. 4; I John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48*

I bet we would have had the very same reaction. I bet if we had been the disciples in the locked room after hearing from the women that Jesus had been resurrected and then actually seeing Jesus standing among us, we too would have been startled and terrified and thought we were seeing a ghost.

This can't be real, the disciples thought. This isn't how we knew Jesus to be. This isn't what we are used to. Jesus was alive and then he died. This must be fake news. This must not be real. This isn't authentically Jesus.

Well obviously Jesus anticipated that this is how the disciples would react. And so, he was ready with an invitation:

"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." And then Jesus did the most human thing he could think of, he asked for something to eat. As he ate the piece of broiled fish in their presence, Jesus proved to them – yes, I am real. Even if I am different than I was before, it is authentically me.

I have been thinking about this gospel passage in relation to our worship services over the past year. When we went into lockdown last March and our worship services became virtual, I'm guessing some of us had the same reaction to online worship as the disciples had to the risen Jesus:

This isn't real. This isn't how I knew worship to be. This isn't what I'm used to. Although many of you have appreciated and enjoyed our online worship services, I know some of you have not felt like this is really worship, or haven't felt comfortable taking communion if it isn't in the sanctuary or distributed directly from a pastor. It doesn't feel authentic to you.

One of the reasons I'm preaching from our labyrinth today is that the Worship and Music Committee and church council have been discussing how and when we will return to in-person worship. The plan we are considering right now includes starting our in-person worship right here, outside on the labyrinth and memorial garden pavers beginning Memorial Day weekend. We're looking into tents to provide shade and protection from rain so we can worship in any type of weather and still remain safe, but we will still require masks and physical distancing for household pods, and will still offer livestreamed worship on Facebook and YouTube.

But that means that worship still won't be quite what we're used to. Worship won't be exactly like it was before the pandemic. For some of us, it still might not feel like "authentic" worship.

The gospel story we heard today from Luke is sandwiched in between the story of Jesus and the two travelers on the road to Emmaus and the story of Jesus' ascension into heaven. In both of those stories, Jesus is either not humanly recognized or Jesus is beyond human when he's taken up into heaven. I'm thinking that the reason the story we heard today is sandwiched in the middle of those two stories is to remind Jesus' first followers and his followers today that even though Jesus was different after he was

resurrected, he was still the authentic human Jesus. The Jesus of Easter was the same Jesus of the Incarnation. As writer Debie Thomas so beautifully puts it, this was “the Jesus who [grew] in a womb, [entered] the world through a birth canal, [slept] in a feeding trough, and [nursed] at Mary’s breast. [This was] the Jesus who [scraped] his knees, [roughhoused] with his playmates, [lost] his parents during Passover, and [went] through puberty in the backwaters of Nazareth. [This was] the Jesus who [soaked] in the waters of baptism, [hungered] for bread in the Judean wilderness, [wept] at his friend’s grave, [flung] a whip around the temple, [appreciated] scented oils on his feet and head, [sweat] blood in the garden of Gethsemane, and [suffered] asphyxiation on a Roman cross. ‘It is I myself,’ Jesus tells his wonderstruck disciples as they struggle to reorder all that they know about life and death, souls and bodies, in the aftermath of his astonishing appearance. It is I myself. Me. The one you know. The one you love. The one you trust. Touch me and see.”

Even though Jesus was different after the resurrection, it was still the authentic and real Jesus.

And though it might seem like an odd comparison, I wonder if our worship is the same way. Even though our worship became different after the pandemic began, and even though it will be different when we return in person, it is still authentic and real worship.

In each of our worship services, we follow the ancient worship pattern of Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. The way we do those things, and the mode through which we do them, either online or gathered in a different place with different parameters, doesn’t mean that our worship isn’t real or authentic.

Because Jesus knows how to enter any worship space, in your living room or on this labyrinth, just like he entered the locked room where the disciples were hiding. And Jesus offers us the same thing that he offered when he first stood among his disciples: peace. Peace be with you Jesus says, and he invites you to see and touch his body, even if it’s a stale cracker and some leftover juice you have for your communion meal today. Jesus enters every worship space, every heart, every earthly element, every crevice of your life to offer peace, healing, and Easter new life.

At our May church council meeting we will decide on a final plan for returning to in-person worship and we’ll communicate that to you fully in mid-May. Until then, know that you are even now authentically worshiping an authentic Jesus, who has loved you and forgiven you and made you a child of God, for that is what you are. Amen.