

“Listening to Stories”

Easter Sunday/April 5, 2026

1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

I. Introduction

I graduated from Northport High School in 1977. The 50th anniversary of my graduation class is coming up next year. I don't know if there will be a reunion. If there is, I might go.

Northport is a remote place in the mountains of NE Washington State, about 15 miles south of the Canadian border on the Columbia River. The economy of the area was based on logging and mining. A lot of that is now gone.

There were 28 in my graduating class. I have not seen most of my classmates in 50 years. Lives just move on. My life moved on to college, living in Seattle, attending seminary in Richmond, Virginia, and then living in Ellwood City and the Shenango Valley for the last 26 years. When my dad retired and my parents moved to Arizona in 2001, I really had no reason to make the trip back to Northport. And so I didn't.

But if there's a reunion, well, that might be interesting. When there are 28 in the class, for better or worse you know everyone. And what I'd do is listen to stories. A lot of life is lived in 50 years. I'd be interested in my classmates' life journeys. Hopefully by the time you're in your late 60s you've past all the foolish braggadocio to just honest reflection. I'm sure my journey to being a Presbyterian pastor surprised most of my classmates. I think I'd be surprised by some of my classmates' stories. Life has a way of surprising us, both the joys and the tragedies. With stories we share about our lives and make sense of our lives. There could be a lot of stories to share covering 50 years. Maybe.

II. Text and Exegesis

Stories. It's Easter Sunday. And that's what we have today: stories. Perhaps later you'll gather with family and friends for Easter dinner. Stories will be told and remembered. But right now, it's "The Easter Story." Or better, Easter stories.

Of course, there is more than one story of Jesus' resurrection. There's Peter's story of his experience with the risen Christ. There's Mary Magdalene's story. There's the story of the two disciples walking to Emaus. There are a few different stories of Jesus appearing to his very surprised disciples. The Apostle Paul also says that the risen Christ appeared to more than 500 people at one time. I bet those would be interesting stories. And then Paul says the risen Christ also appeared to him. (I Corinthians 15:5-9) And this doesn't even count the stories of the women at the empty tomb and their experience with angels.

Many people have studied these stories, and lots of pages have been written about them. They are all similar, but different. And it's always people straining the language to share their story. Jesus appears then he's gone. He breaks bread and eats fish and then he disappears. People don't recognize him and then they do. He has the scars of crucifixion, but they're healed. Jesus has some type of resurrected body; the same but different. All that is to say the stories about the risen Jesus are not about a dream, or a vision, or a wish, or a ghost. They are stories about the experience of a mystery. And those stories and that mystery are the very heart of Christian faith. Our text today is one of those stories.

Read Luke 24: 36-43.

This story takes place on the evening of the first Easter. Jesus' followers are still somewhere in Jerusalem. They appear to have just finished a meal. The death of Jesus hangs heavy over them. And yet early that morning the women reported an empty tomb and the angels' message of "risen." And just now two followers from Emmaus tell their story of experiencing the risen Christ. It seems incredible. Could it possibly be true?

And it's then that Christ appears to them; to all of them. He wasn't there; and now he is. His greeting is one of peace. That's appropriate. The crucifixion crashed all their hopes. They now fear for their own lives. And yet there is the empty tomb, the word of the angels, and this story of resurrection. They aren't sure what to think or feel. But here is Jesus wishing them peace. They would much like some peace.

Their responses are understandable. Over the years they have heard stories of ghosts. Perhaps that's what this is, a ghost. Shock becomes fear. But Jesus then speaks again. They see his hands and feet. He bears the marks of crucifixion. He invites them to touch him. He assures them he is no ghost. He is risen, in a body, but a different type of body.

Shock and fear begin to give way to joy and belief. Jesus stands before them; somehow, somehow, by the power and grace of God. Jesus then says a strange thing. He sees they have been sharing a meal. He asks for something to eat; something leftover on the table. He's given a piece of broiled fish. He eats it. Out of all the things the risen Christ could do or say, to eat a piece of fish seems strange. And yet it says again that he is not a ghost. And, perhaps, it suggests that the risen Christ can be experienced when meals are shared in faith.

That's their story. It's strange and wonderful, surprising and "head scratching." It raises more questions than it answers. And yet it's still the story of their experience. And it became a story that the earliest followers of Jesus told and retold until it became part of Luke's story of Jesus. And we still tell it. And we wonder, and believe, and doubt, and hope. Could it be?

III. Brief Theological Reflection

A 50-year high school reunion. If there's a get-together, I might go. I might go and tell and listen to stories.

One story I might tell is riding in the mountains on motorcycles with a couple high school friends. Northport is nestled in the rural mountains of northeastern Washington State. So, I explored the mountains with a couple friends on old logging roads.

Occasionally, amidst trees and mountains, we would come upon the old ruins of homes. Some were shacks on old mining claims. Others were original homesteads. And a few were old farmhouses. All were built with great promise and hope. But as the years passed, lives and circumstances changed. The promises faded. The people left. And the homes began to fall. And over time little would be left; the logs and sawed lumber returning to the ground from which they came.

But there was also something else. Rocks and stones shaped into foundations and wells and steps and chimneys remained. As floors and walls and roofs fell down and decayed, the stones remained. And when we stopped to see and listen, we could begin to make out the stories of what once was. And so those stones would stand amidst spring rains and summer flowers and fall leaves and winter snow. They remained there, generation after generation, with a story to tell.

I believe that the good and faithful work of our lives is like that. Acts of courage and goodness and kindness and forgiveness and love remain long after the house is gone. I believe that is true for Jesus, and true for us. Rejection and a cross and death do not stop the good things of God. That's resurrection.

And so, stories are told to remind us of Jesus' resurrection; that the good in life is not stopped by the darkness, and that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. I believe that in the mystery and love of God all those good stones of life will be gathered up into God's good purposes, never forgotten, and become part of our resurrection and God's new creation. And so, amidst all the stories we will hear today, we tell and listen to the Easter stories and live with hope.