

Faith and Resiliency
Sermon for April 18
Luke 24:36b-48
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The Presbyterian health care system wants to encourage healthy living for its minister members. So, each year, clergy members such as I can do a variety of activities to lower our medical deductibles for the following year, and create healthy lifestyles. The activities can range from getting your yearly physical, to learning about financial literacy, to meeting exercise goals. You can join online groups to encourage you as you complete these tasks as well.

This past Monday morning, a new activity popped into my Inbox. It was called, *Read About Biblical Resilience*. I clicked on it and read some of the passages. There were 12 listed, and I admit I was a little puzzled over the lack of inclusion of passages from the Gospels ~ sayings of Jesus. I would consider Jesus as one of the most resilient characters in all of scripture. All of the passages were somewhat akin to Biblical exhortations from the Epistles and the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Proverbs. Some listed were:

Philippians 3:13–15 — The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you.

James 1:12 — The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

12 Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Proverbs 3:5–6 — The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

I have to admit, I was left feeling a little flat after having read those. Don't get me wrong, they're wonderful texts, but in this context, they seemed like platitudes, after what we've faced this year. But at least they attempted to direct us to the scriptures.

During this last year of pandemic living, I've consistently heard about the need to develop a sense of resiliency.

How do we maintain a sense of resilience when everything we've known has been ripped away? Experts say good mental health and a sense of resiliency go together.

What does it mean to be resilient? *Psychology Today* defines it this way, "Resilience is the psychological quality that allows some people to be knocked down by the adversities of life and come back at least as strong as before. Rather than letting difficulties, traumatic events, or failure overcome them and drain their resolve, highly resilient people find a way to change course, emotionally heal, and continue moving toward their goals." (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/resilience>)

That may be easier said than done... especially during this past year when we have been faced with everything from prolonged isolation, the loss of loved ones, illness, as well as financial and relational stresses, among

other things. Mental health experts say such a year may easily leave us in a state of trauma. And, just this week, a study came out that shows those who have had covid may be more at risk for longer-term mental health issues.

There's no doubt, as we come out of this time... we need deep healing to recover.

<https://dailyvoice.com/connecticut/wilton/lifestyle/covid-19-about-one-third-of-virus-survivors-have-longer-term-mental-health-issues-study-says/806558/>

Psychology Today offers these tips as a pathway to resiliency:

Healthy habits—getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising—can reduce stress, which may, in turn, boost resilience. Similarly, being sure to nurture close relationships can help an individual find support when trouble arises. Regularly thinking about morals and actively living according to one's values have been linked to higher resilience.

Aha... morals and values... secular terms creeping up to the realm of faith can help one in resilience. A couple of months ago, I conducted several interviews on Mental Health with some of our funds from the Mental Health Ministry grant, and which you can find on our YouTube channel. One specifically on the topic of Trauma features our own Linda Rost, an LCSW who is part of the Fairfield Country Trauma Recovery Network. She says that she asks her clients at intake if they have a faith base. And she's found that those who do have such a support base are better able to cope with trauma than those who don't. (You can find that interview on our [Wilton Presbyterian YouTube page](#)... Called **Voices of Mental Health**. Others include an interview with our own Lindsay Wheeler ~ who

discusses her own journey in mental health, and another with the Rev. Dr. Terrlyn Curry Avery on the topic of Race and Trauma).

Given that the disciples most likely had gone through trauma in the days leading up to and through the death of their beloved Jesus, how does Jesus interact with them? It seems as though; Jesus was trying to help the disciples with resiliency in our text this morning.

Whether or not you believe the events unfolded as they are written in scripture, word for word is not the issue here. Consider the feelings and impact of this story if you will.

This scene is as real as it comes. It was right after the day of Resurrection, and the story of Jesus having appeared to the two travelling on the road to Emmaus. Our text says, Jesus stood among them, and he gave them a greeting they had known from him before: "Peace be with you"; They freak out, as would be expected. Jesus reassures them, as he is connecting with them emotionally and offers them peace vs. the fear he sees. He has compassion. He appeals to their intellect, and knows they need some evidence as to what's happening, so he points to the wounds from his crucifixion, and then he asks for something to eat. He invites them to come together to care for their bodies, all while creating a sense of community. Maybe he noticed they hadn't been taking care of themselves in the recent hours. Those who know the phrase: HALT, that when you're: hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, not much good can happen. Maybe that's what's been at play. He reassures them with the words of his teachings he has told them before. And then they understand what he has meant all along. Perhaps a sense of equilibrium has returned. Finally, he gives them a task... to be his witnesses going forward.

One thing that is clear to me about resiliency as it relates to the scriptures... Resiliency CAN coincide with vulnerability. To be truly resilient requires that we accept our humanity, our powerlessness over

the things we can't control and practice self-care when things don't go as we'd hoped. (The serenity prayer, by Reinhold Neibuhr is the prayer of resiliency, right? God Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.)

Ernest Hemingway once said, "The best people possess a feeling for beauty, the courage to take risks, the discipline to tell the truth, the capacity for sacrifice. Ironically, their virtues make them vulnerable; they are often wounded, sometimes destroyed."

Jesus' physical body, in fact, was destroyed, but his spirit was resilient. To be fully human, we must be able to feel and fully experience the ups and the downs of what life brings us. The spirit of the Risen Christ... the Holy Spirit was sent to help us to manage life's ups and downs and to heal from the things which would keep us from being resilient and from doing what God has called us to do and be.

That's the hope in this story... life did not end with Jesus' death. His resurrection life gives us hope that we can live full and fulfilling and lives, serving God with our whole hearts, souls, minds, and bodies, and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. That's resiliency!

Praise be to God!