

Sermon April 14, 2024 Luke 24:36-49

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever put together all the testimonies from Scripture on the events of Easter day? You might find it interesting to put everything in chronological order. It can be revealing when things get put together in that way and you can see the flow. News that Jesus had returned from the dead was reported to the main group of disciples in several ways by several people. Two men had met the risen Lord when they were walking to the town of Emmaus. Now, Jesus suddenly appeared before them in the upper room. They jumped. Scared. How was Jesus here? They had been focusing their thoughts on Jesus' death. And theirs.

Death may occupy our thoughts as well. Especially with all the chemicals found in our food and water these days. Nothing can be as frightening to us quite like the realization that our life here will end one day. Death and the fear of it come from God's judgment upon us because of our sin. Without Christ, there is only fear in death – fear of judgement and hell.

The great celebration of this Easter season is that the Lord Jesus is not dead either. Neither is he just a spirit, a ghost, an apparition. No, He is alive in the flesh! He speaks to our hearts, calming the stormy seas of doubt and fear with His living presence. "See My hands and My feet," Jesus says to His troubled followers. And through their eyes, we see Him risen. "Touch Me and see." invites the risen Lord. And with and by their hands, we discover that Jesus is not a body-less phantom. The disciples touch and feel His flesh and bones – his body not completely unlike that Jesus had before He died on the cross. With joyful amazement, the disciples' hands take hold of the flesh that was pierced by nails for our transgressions. With wonder and awe, they embrace the One whose bones were suspended from the cross to save the world. He was dead. But now He lives! Jesus' is a human body of skin and muscle, of sinew and bone. Only now, wondrously transformed and glorified for all eternity.

And there's more to this wonder. "Have you anything to eat?" the Lord asks the disciples. Jesus isn't hungry for food. The real hunger Jesus has is for His disciples to know that He has risen. How precious and honored was that piece of broiled fish that Christ consumed before their eyes! It's good to note for the health-conscious that the first thing it says Jesus ate after he rose was fish. And there is more food to come – much more. The almighty Lord who had multiplied the loaves and fish to feed the thousands now presides over the joyous, heavenly banquet—the unending feast of heaven which has already begun for us as we eat from the Lord's table.

Before awestruck disciples, wide-eyed with wonder, Jesus not only appeared and ate the fish, but He also taught them, saying, "Do not be entirely surprised by My resurrection. The Bible said it would happen," He said to them. He says the same to us today. Sacred Scripture clearly teaches a message of our obligations to a just and holy God and how far we have fallen from that mark. We cannot pay our debt to God. We are sinners in need of a Savior. So God the Father, in His love, promised to send His Son to undo sin's curse upon the entire world. And how? Just as Jesus told his disciples, "The Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." In fact, the whole Bible points to Jesus. Scripture's main message is not how to be a good person or how to be happy. The writings from Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms are all about Jesus. These sacred writings were all fulfilled in and by Him. And Jesus now stands alive before the disciples to teach them and us this truth.

Thirdly, Jesus sends the disciples out into the world. He gives them a mission. The word “mission” in Latin means “sent.” God the Father sent His Son into the world to save us. And now, Jesus sends the disciples to all nations to preach salvation in the name of Jesus, as he says, “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name.” These witnesses of His resurrection would have the honor to tell future generations, making disciples of the living Jesus by baptizing and teaching in all the world.

And we, who listen with believing ears and hearts are among those who have been brought into fellowship with the living Jesus through this mission. Jesus’ disciples started out as regular, ordinary men: fishermen, farmers and tax-collectors. But the living Jesus gave them the all-important and powerful gift of the Holy Spirit. His was a gift they could wear like armor, as St. Paul puts it in Ephesians. And cloaked with the Holy Spirit’s presence and power, these men faced danger, rejection, and even giving their lives as witnesses for Christ. Yet, with joy and amazement, the disciples -now-apostles of the risen Lord Jesus fulfilled their mission, proclaiming His saving message and eagerly awaited the unending feast of heaven. Thanks be to God for that!

And do you know what? In these uncertain times, nearly 2,000 years after that first Easter evening, the risen Lord Jesus is also with us. The disciples gave Jesus fish to eat. Now, however, Jesus gives us his very body and blood to eat in His sacramental meal. The message of repentance and forgiveness in his name continues to be preached and taught in our churches. Through these Jesus is leading us to Himself in heaven.

Appearing before his disciples in the locked upper room was one thing. What a wondrous occasion it will be when Jesus appears to us when our time here is ended. God bless you all that everyone of us is kept in the faith until that day. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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