

Easter 3 / April 18, 2021

Luke 24:46-47

“Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Our gospel this morning is the same event described by John in last week’s gospel. Jesus visits the disciples in Jerusalem on Easter evening and shows Himself alive, as they hide behind locked doors. Luke begins earlier in the day, in the afternoon, describing in the preceding verses how Jesus walked with two disciples, not of the twelve, as they headed towards the village of Emmaus, just outside Jerusalem. They were kept from recognizing Him and as they walked together, they related to Him the events of the previous days and how their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, had been crucified and buried; and with Him, all their hopes for the restoration of Israel. Now His body was missing and incredibly, some of the women in their group claimed, *“they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive.”* They didn’t know what to make of it! Nothing made sense anymore!

Have you ever had an experience where your hopes came unravelled and nothing made sense anymore? Sometimes we have good reason to hope for something, but nevertheless chance and circumstance bring our hope to an end. Sometimes our hopes were doomed from the beginning, because they were founded on wishes rather than reality. The hopes of the disciples who followed Jesus were all doomed to failure; not because they didn’t believe He was the Messiah, but because they didn’t understand the meaning of the scriptures and were unable to distinguish between what they thought God would do through the Messiah and what they thought He should do. Jesus identified the problem and addressed it saying, *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?”*

We have all heard of ‘fools gold.’ Fools Gold, otherwise know as ‘pyrite,’ gleams like gold, but is in fact nothing more than a rock. It’s hard to distinguish it from real gold, to the untrained eye it looks the same. People who are unable to distinguish real gold from pyrite have been taken in by scams for centuries, probably for thousands of years. The disciples were foolish, not because they didn’t believe Jesus was the Christ, they believed correctly. They were mistaken because they didn’t understand the scriptures, were mistaken about what He would do and what God would do through Him. Contrary to their understanding the scriptures did not teach that God would redeem Israel from the Romans and make them all incredibly rich and powerful. The scriptures taught that God would redeem humanity from sin, the devil and eternal death and make all who believe in Jesus indescribably rich in forgiveness and eternal life through His resurrection. Whatever we hope God will do in our lives there is nothing more important than what He promises in Scripture to do: Forgive us in time and give us life in eternity through faith in Jesus as the Christ. This is our real and living hope. Promised in the scriptures. Made certain in the resurrection of Jesus!

The two disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, invited Him for dinner when they arrived at their home. Luke says, *“When He was at table with them, He took bread, blessed it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and then they recognized Him.”* Then He vanished from their sight. They ran back to Jerusalem, found the others and told them what had happened on the road and how Jesus had made Himself known in the breaking of the bread. As soon as they finished speaking Jesus appeared and stood among them saying, *“Peace to you.”* Imagine their shock and consternation! What would you think if someone suddenly appeared and stood in front of you? What would you think, if it was someone who had died and been buried? We would think we were seeing a ghost? Do you believe in ghosts? Me neither and that’s why if I ever thought I saw one I would be scared double stiff! The effect is always more intense when we see something we don’t believe!

We don’t believe in ghosts, but we do believe in spirits. We believe that when we die our spirit returns to God who created it. That is a scriptural belief, it says that in the bible, in Ecclesiastes 12:7, *“The dust returns to the earth from which it came and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”* Other things people commonly believe about our spiritual existence after death come from the human religious imagination, rather than from the witness of God in scripture. The resurrection of the body makes little sense to many people, because they imagine the existence of the spirits of believers in heaven in physical terms. People walk on clouds. People play harps, or at least hold them. People look down from heaven and watch their loved ones on earth. How they do those things without feet, hands, arms or eyes is unclear. Nevertheless, those things are widely believed, even though none are stated in scripture and some are contrary to what God says in scripture. In Ecclesiastes 9:5 the Holy Spirit says, *“the dead know nothing...they have no more share in what is done under the sun.”* Even the great cloud of

witnesses mentioned in Hebrews are not witnessing us and cheering us on. Their witness is not their watching, God watches us. Their witness is the testimony they gave to Jesus during their lives. We have to make sure our hopes and beliefs are grounded in scripture, for that is where God gives us true faith and real hope.

The disciples were not seeing the spirit of Jesus, they saw the resurrected Jesus. It was not His ghost, but His body and spirit reunited in His resurrection. To make that point He asked for something to eat and ate it in their presence. Spirits don't have flesh and bones and they don't eat, especially not fish. The resurrection is more than important, it is essential, because God did not create us disembodied spirits, He created us body and spirit. When the first humans sinned, the effect was death in body and spirit. Jesus assumed a real body and joined His Spirit to our humanity, so that He might redeem us from sin, the devil and death in both body and spirit. It was important that the disciples saw Him resurrected, because our faith is built on the resurrection of Jesus and our hope is to share in His resurrection. Our faith is real, because Jesus truly rose from the dead, body and spirit. Our hope is certain, because it is based on the words of scripture, promised through the prophets, witnessed by the apostles and attested to by the evangelists!

Beyond showing Himself alive, the most important thing Jesus did that evening in Jerusalem so long ago, was to open the disciples' minds to understand the Scriptures. Especially what was written about the Him, that "*The Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations.*" The most important person in the Scriptures is Jesus. He is the key, by which we understand the Scriptures and in them, know God as our loving Father. We know God as our loving Father through Jesus and the sacrifice He made on the cross. He is the image of the invisible God. He made peace between us and God through the blood of His cross. In Jesus we receive adoption as God's children through the washing of Holy Baptism in the forgiveness of our sins. He is the Saviour of all people. He died for the sins of every human soul. He rose for the salvation of everyone and He gives eternal life to all who believe in His Name. We know these things, because the Holy Spirit testifies to them in the Scripture.

Jesus shows Himself to us through the witness of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. In turn we show Jesus to others, by leading them into the Scriptures. No matter what we might say about what Jesus has done in our lives, the most important witness is what He has promised to do in all our lives, in the scriptures. The apostles all saw Jesus with their eyes before and after His resurrection. Peter along with James and John, saw Jesus' glory shine through His body earlier at His transfiguration. But in his second letter Peter leads us to see Jesus, not through His experience, but through the witness of the Scriptures, which now also include his experience. He saw Jesus' glory. He heard the divine voice declare Him His beloved Son. He saw Jesus risen from the dead, but nevertheless he said, "*we have something more certain, the prophetic word to which you will do well to pay attention as to a light shining in a dark place.*" In the words of Moses, the prophets, the psalmists, apostles and evangelists, we see Jesus and know Him as our Saviour. Through the witness of their words, we tell others the good news of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' Name. God open our hearts to faith, our minds to understanding and our lips to proclaim Jesus and the salvation God gives through Him. Amen