

2021-04-18 – Rev Esma Collins-Marks

Luke 24: 36-48

Has anyone ever told you something so outrageous or so unbelievable that you thought you couldn't believe it unless you saw it for yourselves? Have you ever seen anything that was so unbelievable that it was scary? If so, then you can understand how the disciples felt after they saw the risen Jesus in the reading we just heard from Luke.

The disciples did not immediately believe after seeing the resurrected Christ. They felt great joy, but the truth had not created faith in their hearts. Perhaps it still seemed too good to be true. This detail alone should quash any thought that the disciples desired so much to see Jesus alive that they made themselves believe. In fact, even when they saw, doubts arose in their hearts. They needed to see that being with Jesus was a metaphor for being with God. He signalled the coming of the Reign of God.

How many of us have been in a similar place? We might have been in a place of disappointment or hardship. Jesus was there with us, but we didn't see him because our thoughts were on our situation. We might even wonder why the disciples needed consoling so much that their imaginations played tricks on them. Jesus helped them to see that God can bring new life after death.

Luke wants to make it clear to us that our real, physical world is so valuable that God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, our Risen Saviour. He came to heal our physical, mental, spiritual and emotional needs. He continually meets us in this world, especially as we gather around the word of God.

The apostles were the first witnesses, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, all believers are the custodians of the truth. God poured out his Holy Spirit on us at Pentecost. That Spirit is a present power in our lives. We are being healed, transformed, liberated and sent on missions because of the supernatural God living in and among us by his Spirit.

What do you think would have happened if Jesus had not made his presence known when he did? Perhaps the disciples would have gone back to whatever their lives were before Jesus called them. Jesus stood among them. He reminded them that his coming was for peace. He invited them to see for themselves that it was him in the flesh and not a ghost. He told them to stay put and wait for the power that was to come.

This passage emphasises the reality of Jesus' resurrected body and the need for Jesus' death and resurrection to fulfil God's plan for salvation. In Jewish folklore, the spirits of the dead appear to mortals only to engage in evil activities. When Jesus suddenly appeared to the small group of disciples, it was a frightening supernatural event.

Jesus spent time with his disciples, summarizing his ministry, especially the Old Testament prophecies. He prepared them to continue his work after he returned to heaven. He laid out exactly what their message after he left earth should be about. He gave them the courage to speak publicly on a street corner in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and that speech led thousands of Jews into the Christian faith in a very public baptism as written in Acts 2. The disciples had the mission and power to change the world.

Jesus and the risen Christ are the same. The only difference is that the body of the risen Christ is different from his pre-resurrection body. It is fully healed, strong and not subject to the death and decay of the flesh. Jesus presented himself to the disciples not as a disembodied spirit, but as a person in bodily form. His body was recognizable by sight and touch. His body was capable of eating food. Just like Jesus was raised from the dead, we will also be raised from the dead in bodily form according to the Scriptures. Our bodies are not useless pieces of garbage that we will leave behind when we die. They are an integral part of our identity.

Luke reminds his readers in verse 44 that Jesus came to satisfy all the prophecies made about him in the Old Testament. It has been said that Jesus was concealed in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. Everything that was written about Jesus in the Bible was

fulfilled. That was why Jesus taught his disciples in the Scriptures while he was with them during his life and his resurrection. They needed to understand the significance of the past. Jesus came to fulfil the Old Testament, not to abolish it.

We, like the disciples, can't understand life after resurrection, but we know that resurrection is God's plan for us. Jesus is the model for God's plan. The resurrected Jesus was no ghost. He explained the Scriptures to the disciples, especially the Scriptures dealing with resurrection. The disciples were physical witnesses to the resurrection, and we are witnesses to the risen Christ through the Scriptures. We are witnesses when we come to church. We are witnesses when we come to the Lord's Table to receive communion. We are witnesses when we do a kind act for someone. We are witnesses when we invite a friend or neighbour to church. We are witnesses when we get up in the morning and decide to let God guide us through the day.

In verse 39, Jesus offered the disciples proof that he rose from the dead, and he wants us to have the same proof. More important, he wants to prove that he is our friend. God is on our side. Satan persuaded Adam and Eve that God was not their friend and that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was forbidden because if they ate it, they would become as wise as God. Satan convinced them that God couldn't be trusted. The Old and New Testaments are the records of God's attempts ever since to convince us that he is our friend, and we can trust him. Jesus wants to stand with us through job uncertainty, illness, loneliness, and estrangement.

The disciples heard the Lord teach innumerable times. They watched him perform miracles for at least three years. They saw him crucified and now they stood in his resurrected presence. It was only when the Lord opened their minds to understand the Scriptures that they truly comprehended. The understanding of the Scriptures that is, understanding how all of the pieces of redemptive history fit together is a gift of God. Spiritual understanding comes through the Spirit of the living God, or it does not come at all. God's influence helps us understand and

accept the truth of his word. Without understanding, the things of the Holy Spirit are foolish to normal human beings.

We can, and should, read the Scriptures at home, but it doesn't replace hearing the Word of God preached and taught in church. Preaching can strike us in a way that adds new meaning to God's Word. Understanding Scripture has a lot to do with the mindset that we bring to the pages of the Bible. We need to be open to new revelations to really understand the meaning of God's Word for our lives. In return, God works in us to go into the world to share the gospel. When we do, future generations will be able to put their trust in Jesus and continue his work until he returns.

In verses 46 and 47, Luke makes it clear that the message of Christ must include a focus on repentance and the remission of sins. One without the other is incomplete. When we understand Scripture, we move from doubt to worshipping and great joy. We are to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name and in all nations. Jesus said that after his death and resurrection, the message his followers would carry to others would be about repentance and forgiveness. In fact, Jesus called on his disciples to preach this to all nations. Amen.