

Third Sunday of Easter; April 14, 2024
+ Luke 26:36-49 +
Your Savior Says: "Live Like I Rose"

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

But they were terrified and frightened and thought they were looking at a ghost.

He said to them, "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they still did not believe it (because of their joy), and while they were still wondering, he said to them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"

They gave him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took it and ate it in front of them. He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said to them, "This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Do you like conflict? Do you like having people angry with you? I think that most of us would answer no to these questions. And yet, that's what Christians get when they speak to others about Jesus. People don't naturally want to hear about a Savior, because his existence means they must have sin from which they need to be saved. People often do not like it when Christians try to tell them the truth of Scripture. Because of these conflicts, there are plenty of times that we don't want to speak about our faith. Rather than living in the joy of the resurrection, we keep to ourselves and don't speak about Jesus. Jesus wants us to live and speak like he rose.

At first, on the first Easter Sunday, the disciples were not living or speaking like Jesus rose. Easter Sunday was a hectic day for the disciples. Various reports were coming in throughout the day that Jesus was alive. Early in the morning, the women had discovered the empty tomb. The women reported to the disciples. Peter and John had gone to inspect that tomb. Jesus had also appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They didn't recognize him even while he was explaining the Scriptures to them. But finally, when he broke bread with them, they saw that it was Jesus. Those two disciples went back to the other disciples and reported what had happened. In spite of the mounting evidence, there was still a lot of confusion and doubt among the disciples.

There was confusion because they were not yet mature enough in their faith to understand what was happening. Even though they had been thoroughly trained by Jesus for three years, they still needed more growth. They were just starting to recognize the resurrection but they didn't know why Jesus would rise

from the dead. And so on Easter Sunday they were still plagued with doubts. They were hearing reports that Jesus was alive, but that was hard to believe, because they – St. John, at least – had witnessed his crucifixion. They had seen that gruesome event. They needed some assistance if they were going to fully trust that Jesus was alive again – and to live and speak like it, too.

Jesus helped their faith to grow. He helped to remove their doubt and confusion. He appeared to them. The very first thing he said was to comfort them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Rather than being at peace, the disciples were startled and frightened. They thought that they had seen a ghost. So Jesus said, **“Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”** Once the disciples saw that Jesus was really among them, some of their doubts and fears started to subside.

They trusted that the resurrection had taken place, but still they had much more maturing to do before they would live like it, and be the ones to share the gospel message with the world. After all, these were the same men who had all run away when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Every last one of them was too afraid to stick by Jesus side. It is true that Jesus directed events so that they could all leave and not be arrested. However, there was certainly a lapse of faith on the part of the disciples. The biggest fall came from Peter who even denied knowing Jesus.

Even now, these men had still had their stubborn doubts, even after they knew that the Jesus they were seeing was no ghost. They certainly had questions that would be answered shortly. Perhaps they wondered if Jesus would truly forgive them for running away in the Garden. They were curious about what all these events meant for the future. Before the ascension, they asked Jesus if he was going to restore the geo-political kingdom of Israel. They were still confused, even at that point. They still didn’t fully understand the true mission of the Messiah. They were still wondering if he was an earthly king. They did not yet understand the true meaning of the death on the cross. Even then, even in their final moments standing with Jesus in the flesh, they still needed to grow in their knowledge of the forgiveness of sins.

We too have questions and some confusion that plague us in our life of faith. Our questions are not exactly the same as those of the disciples, but we still need to be cautious. The devil likes to use our questions to create doubt. When our rational mind can’t understand the truths of Scripture, the devil tries to morph questions into doubts about Scripture. He wants us to think that it can’t possibly be a true book if we can’t fully understand the mysteries that we see laid out there. The devil likes to use the same tactic he used on Eve in the Garden of Eden, “Did God really say ...” And you can fill in the blank with many possibilities.

“Did God really say that he is three persons and yet one God? After all, we don’t see the word Triune in the Bible.” “Did God really say that he created the world in 6 24-hour days? Couldn’t he have used the process of evolution to create this universe? People much, much, smarter than you say so!” “Did God really say, ‘A man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife?’ Isn’t love love, at the end of the day?” I could go on and on with more examples. The devil uses these situations and others to try to make us doubt God and turn away from him. Even if we don’t question teachings like this, other people in our lives might ask us about these things. How do we answer their questions?

That is often the fear that leads us to stay off the topic of our faith. “I want to tell my friend about Jesus’ love, his forgiveness, the hope he gives me. But what if he asks me a question I can’t answer?” It’s not just hostile conflict we fear, it’s the awkwardness of questions we can’t answer, questions we struggle with ourselves. And so often, we just avoid those questions. We keep our mouths shut. We don’t speak up for the truth. The devil tempts us to avoid seeking Biblical answers for those questions. He tempts us to be complacent in our faith. Rather than seeking out someone who can help us with those questions, we just ignore them and go about our daily lives.

Jesus plainly told the disciples that it was their responsibility to witness to others about the gospel of forgiveness. Jesus opened up the Scriptures to them so that they understood more. They had heard many of these truths before but now they were hearing it in a new way. **He said to them, “This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to these things. Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”**

Jesus plainly tells them what has just happened and what is about to happen. The suffering and death were all about repentance and forgiveness of sins. This message needs to be proclaimed to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. The disciples who had witnessed these events were going to be the first to proclaim this message. In order to help them with their doubts and fears, they were going to receive power from on high. The Holy Spirit was going to come upon them at Pentecost. On that day they would be blessed with understanding and confidence so that they could take the message of forgiveness to the world.

When you look at the disciples before and after Pentecost you see a dramatic change. Before Pentecost, they were foolish and confused. They didn’t understand the truth and they did not want to speak up in front of crowds that might be hostile toward them. But then the Holy Spirit came upon them. We see a drastic change. After Pentecost, the disciples stand up for the truth no matter what might happen to them. They plainly tell anyone who would listen that Christ died for their sins. They bravely point out to Jewish audiences that while there was blame on them for Jesus’ crucifixion, God’s grace was for them, too, and his grace in Christ was full and complete.

Unbelievers who stood in their unbelief didn’t like to hear the message that the disciples were sharing. The disciples were arrested many times because they were talking about Jesus. That is how bold they were to speak up for Jesus! They didn’t care that they might be thrown in prison. They knew that their message was too important to not be shared. There was even a time when the rulers ordered them to stop teaching about Jesus. Peter declared that they must obey God rather than men. This is quite the change from those disciples on Easter Sunday who were locked in the upper room because they were afraid. The disciples continued to grow in their faith and they continued to witness for Christ. In the end – though it takes time and effort from Jesus and the Holy Spirit—they lived like Jesus rose.

How do we live like he rose? How do we witness for Christ in our lives? First of all we need to be strengthened in our own faith. We need that time in the Word so that we can answer questions of those around us, and also know when the best answer is “I don’t know; God hasn’t told us the answer to that

one in the Bible.” And we need strength from the Word so that we can share the good news with many people. When we have doubts and questions about our faith, we go back to the Bible to learn. We talk to our spiritual leaders because they have been trained in the Scriptures and will be able to give us direction that will help us mature in our faith. Christians make use of the resources that God has given us for the strengthening of our faith.

Living like Jesus rose requires a strong faith, faith that then leads us also speak to others about their Savior. We all encounter people in our lives who are stuck in sins. Honestly, all unbelievers are stuck in sin. We look for opportunities to share Christ. This doesn't mean that the first thing we do is to come down super hard with the law. We don't want to give the impression that we Christians are the morality police. Besides, it can even look like person is living outwardly according to God's Commandments, but they have no faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. They need Jesus, too, no matter how upright their lives look. We build relationships so that we can share the gospel. We start with simple law so that they see themselves as sinners who need a Savior. Then we share Jesus. It does not need to be any more complicated when we speak than it was when Jesus spoke to his disciples on the first Easter: simple, straight, pure gospel. We are witnesses for Christ.

The disciples saw him, heard him, learned from him, the risen Jesus. He still lives and we still see, hear, and learn from him, the risen Jesus. The result will be that we live our lives knowing that he lives: confident in our own salvation, and eager to spread it whenever we can. Amen.