

## Sermon - April 14, 2024

In our world today we're often told, 'If something seems to be too good to be true, it probably is.' I wonder if that's what the disciples were thinking, in their fear, when all of the sudden Jesus appears to them. We are now in the Gospel of Luke. We've looked at the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John at Jesus' Resurrection appearances after he has risen from the tomb, the way that he has shown himself to his disciples. This week we now get to hear Luke's version of this story. But, what we need to be mindful of, as we listen to the gospel this morning, is we're coming into the middle of a longer story.

You see, in Luke, Mary Magdalene has seen Jesus, thought he was the gardener, and then goes and tells the disciples. Then there are two men that are on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, following all that has occurred with the crucifixion and resurrection. Along that journey Jesus starts to walk with them, but they don't know it's him. While they walk, he talks about the scriptures and how what happened in Jerusalem, the crucifixion and the resurrection, were the fulfillment of what the scriptures had said about the Messiah; because those that were hoping for the Messiah were not expecting the Messiah to be crucified, that was not a part of how they interpreted scripture. They thought the Messiah was going to conquer the Roman Empire and get rid of them, so that the Jewish culture, the Israelites, could once again be free to worship, and live the way that they wanted to live in God's covenant; but that's not what happened. Jesus as the Messiah, instead, conquered death not the Roman Empire. Jesus explains this to those disciples on their way to Emmaus and then, when they're there, they encourage him to have a meal. Then he blesses and breaks bread to eat with them; and that's when they realize who Jesus is. In that realization Jesus disappears. They decide to go back and tell the disciples about this encounter and that's this story.

These two men who have seen Jesus, who have had him explain the scriptures, who have had him break bread with have now told the disciples, 'We have seen the Lord!' This is the second time they've been told that Jesus has appeared to someone, and yet here they are in this room together. Luke now tells us about Jesus standing among them, apparently out of nowhere, and saying to them, "Peace be with you."

What I love about that being Jesus' first words in any of these appearances is that it means Jesus understands our reaction. Jesus knows that they're scared. Jesus knows that they aren't prepared for what he is doing, and what God has already done. So, the first thing he tries to do is calm them down. "Peace be with you." Shalom. Be at rest, be at peace, be at calm. Yet they were terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost. I have to wonder, when they started telling people about this, if that was the original ghost story. You know, those stories we tell at campfires? Those are told intentionally what? To scare us. They're often not even actually about ghosts, are they? This story is literally about what they think is a ghost, but the hope and the joy that comes out of this ghost story is it's not. Jesus, indeed, is not a ghost and offers them the proof they need to know that he is not a ghost. "He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.'"

There's something amazing that happens in that encounter. Think about where the disciples are, how they're feeling; frightened and doubtful. Jesus says, 'Why do doubts...?' These are the people that Jesus told, 'I'm going to be crucified and in three days I'm going to rise again.' They heard that this was going to happen, and yet, they doubt. In the midst of the doubt Jesus doesn't say, 'Well, because you don't really believe I'm going to stay over here, and until you really understand what's going on, then you can come to me.' No. In the midst of their fear and doubting Jesus invites them to encounter him. Jesus invites them to draw closer to him and not be at a distance. He doesn't say, 'You have to believe and then you can come be closer.' He says, 'In your doubting, in your fear, draw close. Come and see and touch and feel, and know that it is I. I am with you.' Jesus is in their midst, and invites them into a

closer encounter with him.

"...he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering..." Even with the proof right there in front of them they still didn't know, they still weren't sure. "It was too good to be true." That gives me hope. That gives me hope that in the times when I'm not quite sure, when at times I wonder if God is actually doing something, God still invites me into relationship. God still invites me into faith. God still acts to draw me closer into that relationship. What a blessing to know that I don't have to have it all figured out. It's OK to have questions. God welcomes that. (sighs) Ahh. What a peace that comes from knowing that.

To prove that he is not just some ghostly figure that's with them, but is actually flesh and blood once more, he asks for something to eat. They give him a piece of the fish that they're eating, and he eats. He once again partakes with the disciples, sharing with them. Then he reveals to them, "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures..." the exact same phrase that is used with the two walking to Emmaus. He opens their minds to understand the scriptures in new ways that explain who he is. I wonder if this was his way to help us understand that that is how we are to read scripture, through the lens of Jesus' resurrection, the hope and the invitation of relationship. As we look back at what the Old Testament and the gospels tell us, we do so through the lens of God's love and redeeming work through Jesus Christ our Lord, the joy of salvation.

"...repentance and forgiveness of sin is to be proclaimed, he says, in his [meaning Jesus the Messiah's] name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Then he tells them, 'You are witnesses of this.'" 'You are the ones, starting now, who are to go and tell. You've seen this for yourselves. You know this to be true, now start where you are.' They're still in Jerusalem. 'Start where you are and go from there throughout the world, letting people know that this has happened.'

I love that idea from starting where we are, not just geographically. Don't just start from where you are in your home, in your place, but start from where you are in your faith journey. You don't have to be further along to start proclaiming. Start from where you are. Start with what you know. Start with what you've experienced. Share your story of encountering God through Christ. Start from where you are. Jesus met them where they were in their doubts, in their wondering, in their disbelieving and invited them to know more, to experience more, so that they would have more to share. God, through Jesus, invites us to draw closer in our doubts, in our wondering, in our disbelieving, to draw closer. Then, starting from there, to share, to tell others of the hope, the peace and the joy that is in the resurrection, because it shows God's love, not just through them then, but for us now, and for the world to come.

Let us pray. Lord God, we thank you. We thank you that you meet us where we are in our doubts, in our fears, and our unbelief; and that you invite us to come closer. That in that invitation you open to us new ways of understanding who you are, and then you encourage us to share what we learn. Continue to guide us, Lord God. We pray to continue to be drawn closer, and to be given the courage to share that story; so others too might draw closer in your name. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our resurrected Lord. Amen.

This is the end of the transcribed materials.