

Luke 24: 36b – 48

Last week we had the end of John's gospel and now we get the ending of Lukes...so what do we do when all the things we have thought and said and believed about God don't quite line up with the way we actually experience our lives? For all of us... STUFF happens doesn't it?!

Could the disciples still believe that Jesus was the real deal – the Messiah? What were they feeling in all this? It was in the midst of such fear and hopelessness that Jesus came to them and opened up for them a new possibility.

And so the story continues beyond the cross and even the resurrection in Luke Chapter 24...and the story goes on not because the disciples found within themselves intestinal fortitude and a will to press on....No the story continues because Jesus came and sought out his doubting, questioning, failing, afraid and hopeless followers...just like us!

And this my friends is our hope! That Jesus comes to us in surprising ways... especially when we least expect it. This is the heart of it. Jesus appeared to the eleven last week and bestowed peace upon them, not once, but three times! During their terror, uncertainty, failures, and doubts...the presence of Jesus meant peace and shalom right in the midst of their circumstances. How many of us could use a little peace right now? This kind of peace, however, is a grounding that transcends our lot in life...our circumstances.

In this passage we also see the nature of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus assures the disciples that he's not a ghost but that He's here in the flesh. While this may not be an issue for us today in the ancient world all people believed in ghosts - disembodied spirits! And the Israelites had prohibitions against contacting such spirits.

Luke strongly makes the point that this is not a ghost of the dead returned, or mere resuscitation - Zombie Jesus... but rather it's the flesh and blood Jesus whom they had followed...

Jesus invites them to "touch and see," to confirm with their senses... what their minds would not accept. Then Jesus eats with them.

This resurrection is radically different than what many people believed about death. We could debate the ways in which the resurrected Christ was different than the crucified Jesus. But the point here in Luke's gospel is the continuing story of Jesus and His disciples.

Jesus is not simply a spiritual entity here. He is the same guy. The resurrection does not divorce Jesus from his previous life on earth. There is continuity between earthly Jesus and the resurrected Jesus.

Connection between having life here and now... and the life that is yet to come!

Jesus had died, and there was a finality in that death. But just as strongly Luke affirms that something new happened – resurrection...a transformation in which Jesus lives again!

God acted in history by raising Christ from the dead, thereby doing something new. The resurrection of Jesus is a transcendence beyond the power of sin and death...But Jesus didn't die, so that we don't have to!

Remember He says pick up your crosses and follow...Jesus is pointing us to something beyond our crosses...beyond our circumstances...and points us to something even beyond death itself!

For Luke...earlier in the Emmaus account, and later again in Acts which was also written by the same author... Jesus is presented as the "fulfillment," or the embodiment of what the Old Testament Scriptures were pointing to all along.

There is a trajectory, an evolutionary emphasis on the continuation of God's work... then with Israel... and now with us here in this church today.

The new connected to the ancient... and the ancient made new.

So, the disciples were made open to hearing the Scriptures in a new way... seeing the connected bigger picture and the direction of God's story in relationship with us in creation.

So "it is written" is like saying this has been God's plan all along. In other words, the "new" is not really new... but it is the old now looked upon through the new lens of the resurrected Christ.

The ancient and the new always seem to dance with one other. It's like having a living room...you get rid of the old furniture and buy some new things.

Soon you see that there are familiar elements of old and new intertwined. A chair to sit it is still a functional chair to sit in...and without the furniture the living room still remains...and if there was a fire and the house was all of a sudden gone then we would notice that the ground underneath it has also been there all along... In other words what is the thing...then the thing behind the thing...and what's behind that thing?

The commission given to the disciples in these verses here at the end of Luke's gospel is grounded in God's revelation of Godself to God's people from the very beginning.

As the theologian Paul Tilich says: "God is the ground of our being" That is... God is the thing behind the thing behind the thing! It would be like asking a fish how it experiences water? The fish is made up of water, it breathes water... and it moves in water... and without water the fish would cease to exist. So water would be the ground of it's being.

Now think of the furniture in the house as the rituals and rules, the living room as our religion, the house as our idea of God and the ground on which it all stands being the thing beyond that which we might not comprehend...the mystery, the base note!

Jesus in the resurrection reveals to us the thing behind the thing. And now for Luke we must act as witnesses to this greater reality.

We are being asked as Abram was first asked by God to move beyond our tribal ways of thinking and to be a community of witnesses to the entire world... expanding not only to Israel but to "all nations" which later then becomes the beating heart in Luke's book of Acts which follows the gospels.

God does something new in the world... but it is as old as time itself! It's the way it all works, and Jesus reveals this reality to us... He calls it the Kingdom of God. And Luke presents it in such a way that it is not a new development...but something that had always been God's purpose all along...and it's no different today!

So now what do we do with this new normal...this new revelation (the Greek word Apocolypse)...how do we now proceed with this new information and wisdom.

Well we witness to it... We share it with others... We invite people into this reality where the grounding of all our lives is God and the result of that connection is Shalom...a peace which transcends our worldly cares and circumstances.

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See the resurrection of Jesus was a new beginning for the disciples...they had envisioned a future that their ancestors foretold of a new King David and that paradigm was shattered for them as they witnessed Jesus...their Messiah die! Their assumptions about Jesus and about God had fallen apart. They were so devastated by the death of not only Jesus... but also the death of their hopes and dreams that they could not even believe the first reports that Jesus had been raised.

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So here we are today...and what are OUR assumptions about Jesus and God? Is our view of God also a bit too small...do we imagine brand new furniture or a brand new house or is it something much greater than we can imagine...the thing behind the thing!

What's the point... and where is it all heading...Here the Church lives in the "in-between time" on a journey between the "already" of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, and the "not yet" of something new yet to come.

And yet we are not passive...we have been commissioned to be a witness to the whole world about the redemptive activity of God's ongoing presence even now in the world today.

We are called to proclaim the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation...the hope of newness that is given voice in the resurrection itself. It is a grand vision of being God's people and becoming God's agents of transformation in the world. And we do this work through the Spirit of God...the very ground of our being!

Luke warns us that if we try to be the church without the power of the Holy Spirit behind us, we will expend a lot of energy and activity without really getting anywhere. And we run the risk of attributing our successes to our own efforts, our skills and our superiority, rather than being in alignment with the Spirit of God! Being in the flow!

You can always tell when you are swimming upstream can't you...It feels too much like "pushing"! It's too much work to get anywhere. But when you repent - turn back into the flow... then it almost feels effortless...it's like body surfing!

Luke tells us that the church cannot be the church without the power of the Holy Spirit enabling us to reveal the kingdom of God to the world. Jesus tells us to be the light of the world. Now we are not the sun itself but like the moon when turned towards the sun we can reflect the sun's light into the darkness of our world.

Luke is clear that the church is the church only when it has become clothed with the power of the Spirit. Otherwise, we may find ourselves like the Emperor and his new clothes!

And so we wait and we work...we breath the Spirit in and we breath the Spirit out...the Spirit is to flow through us...like a fishing taking in water... This is God's Grace flowing into the world through us...And by the way the word for Spirit in Hebrew – Ruach...It's also is the word for breath!

It's the rhythm of the universe...how it was... and how it is yet to be!

So Jesus is clear when he tells us that the kingdom of God WILL come ...but remember it is like a seed... not Amazon Prime!

This is the resurrection! When life has been shattered through tragedy and heartache, through sin and failure, our hope for something new comes through our connection with the ground of our being...God!

And like the disciples our hope for the future does not lie in our ability to muster up enough faith to believe the unbelievable. At times we too are disheartened and afraid to have that much faith. Yet into the midst of it all, Jesus comes to us and there is peace.

He sat and ate with them, assuring us today that the resurrection is a physical and present reality... assuring us of a new hope for the future, a hope that transcends all things... and transcends all endings...even death itself!

The turning point for past and present disciples comes when we encounter the presence of God. And God will always take the initiative to come to us opening our eyes and our hearts to a new reality, and with it new possibilities!

The resurrection brings us a hope that goes beyond the endings of our past. We are now called to encounter the presence of the risen Christ here today!

For The Lord IS Risen...The Lord IS Risen ...Today... and Tomorrow  
and Always!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Your faithful servant,

carmen