

Luke 24:36-49
Third Sunday of Easter
April 14, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, the gospel reading, highlighted by these words, “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, 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, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A few things ought immediately jump out at you when considering this Gospel reading: first, you ought recognize that this is the exact same scene we considered last week, as we heard in John’s gospel account this way:

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”

That’s how John’s gospel summarizes the scene. But Luke gives us more detail. The disciples *were* locked away, but they had just welcomed into their safe confines two of their own, who were now “talking about these things,” namely, telling them what they had seen on the road to Emmaus – that they had encountered the

risen Jesus. It's as they are talking about that that Jesus himself comes and stands among the disciples and says, "Peace be with you."

So, that's the first thing that ought immediately jump out at you – this is the same thing we heard about last week, but in more detail.

Here's the second thing that ought jump out at you: John highlights Thomas' doubt in the resurrection, but Luke highlights *all* of their doubts in the resurrection. Indeed, where John highlights that Thomas would not believe unless he saw, Luke highlights that the disciples *saw...* and still disbelieved because they thought Jesus to be a ghost. And, the first half of our text is all about Jesus proving to them that he is no ghost, but is flesh and blood.

That really is the issue at hand, isn't it? The disciples go from being startled and frightened, to Him reading their hearts and minds – "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" And, to apply this to our own lives, we often like to talk about how our hearts are troubled, we have doubts about faith and life and things theological and spiritual, and whether my life will ever improve or my future seem bright, or whether I'll be able to confess boldly in persecution, or whether God's promises are relevant or whether He has forgotten me (yes, so many ways

in which we dialogue – the actual Greek word – in our hearts) ... but that totally misses the point, that they were specifically dialoging in their hearts about whether what they were seeing was really flesh-and-blood... and Jesus was precisely defending the flesh-and-blood reality of what they were seeing.

This whole scene is a commentary on the centrality of Christ's flesh-and-blood dealing with His Church, isn't it? To be sure, when Jesus asks, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?", that should have made them (and perhaps us) think of his words to them in this same upper room three nights before: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me." But is that talk any less flesh-and-blood truth? The incarnate Christ calls us not to believe that He is simply the redeemer of souls, but the redeemer of the whole man, so that when he promises, "I will come again and take you unto myself, that where I am you may be also," we ought not think of our souls ascending into the clouds and being equipped with wings, halos, and harps... but we ought realize Jesus is speaking of our share in His very physical death and resurrection.

That might describe the doubts and dialogings of the heart we have: "Is hope in Christ really going to benefit me in a tangible way? Does it really matter to my body and life, or just to my 'conscience and soul'?"

The answer to that lies in the fact that Jesus so precisely defends the flesh-and-blood reality of what the disciples see and hear... for, if it is true of him, it is true of all who have been baptized into his death and await their share in His resurrection.

So then, we can take such comfort in hearing how the wrestling in that upper room played out: “Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.”

Consider that last phrase: “It is I myself.” This is not an English-downplaying of the great “I AM” phrase... this is a different phrase, “εγω ειμι αυτος” – literally, in Greek grammar, both the first and third words emphasize the self – Jesus very ‘humanly’ pleading with them to recognize him: “See my hands and my feet, it’s me, it’s my very self.” Now, is that said by the *redeemer*? Of course. But it’s also said by the first-fruits of the resurrection, to an audience that does not yet *realize* it is seeing the firstfruits of the resurrection. And (theoretically), if we were all to be raised one at a time, those of us raised first would be saying the same thing to those who can’t yet fathom the truth that the resurrection is for them, too.

To a lesser degree, you can imagine Lazarus saying the same thing to his sisters after Jesus raised him from the dead: “No, really, Mary and Martha, it’s me, your brother.” But, that

was *before* the completed atoning sacrifice, so that Jesus (and not Lazarus, nor Jairus' daughter, nor the widow's son)... Jesus is the *firstfruits* of the resurrection, which – for us – flows from forgiveness in the blood of Jesus' cross. And so, as the firstfruits of the new creation, standing before those who can only think of, only reason in terms of the old creation, Jesus says, "It is I myself." And, thereby he also hints at how you will recognize each other in the resurrection, seeing each other face to face in the body made glorious and perfect.

It almost **sounds** too good to be true, so Jesus appeals to *other* senses: "**Touch** me and **see**. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And, the text says, He showed them his hands and feet (still, and forever, nail-pierced hands and feet.)

So, here we were, last week, all bent out of shape that Thomas wouldn't believe, and yet the same exercise was first done for the others while Thomas was away. And, necessarily so: Why? Because of a lack of faith? No, 'necessarily so' because – as Jesus says – "You are eyewitnesses." Eyewitnesses actually beheld and heard and touched the risen Jesus. It was required in order for the Gospel to be proclaimed to all nations.

Recall that the replacement for Judas in the place of apostleship needed to be one who was an eyewitness of the

resurrection. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised if the two names suggested in Acts 1 – Justus and Matthias – were the two who had been on the road to Emmaus and, now, in the Upper Room, were with the Eleven. Yes, “**witnesses** of the resurrection” the apostles needed to be. And so, how important it was for them to see, hear, even touch, the risen Jesus – yes, true flesh and blood... incarnate, crucified, risen (all three: his status!).

Now, that *should* give us so much comfort – eyewitnesses who saw, heard, and touched the risen Lord and thus were willing to be martyred for the faith, because they knew they were not confessing something ‘spiritual’ and ‘ethereal’ and ‘cerebral’... but real, tangible, flesh-and-blood. That *should* give us comfort, that the word *faith* is not synonymous with lower-case-s ‘spiritual’ things having to do with phantoms and myths and the subjective heart, but rather faith in Christ has to do with the objective flesh-and-blood things which Christ achieved and by which the Holy Spirit works. That’s what *spiritual* truly means – of the Spirit, of the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ to bring to remembrance all that the flesh-and-blood Christ did.

So, Christianity has nothing to do with lower-case-s ‘spiritual’ things. The crucified and risen Jesus says, “A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And, as we have said, if that’s true for ‘Christ the firstfruits’ of the resurrection, it’s

also true for ‘Christian the secondfruits.’ Your salvation now, and your deliverance then, is not just spiritual, but of the Spirit for both body and soul. That’s your ‘life everlasting.’

Thus, you must acknowledge that also now. Faith in Christ is not only about the cerebral. It’s a flesh-and-blood truth, with flesh-and-blood wrestling. When the apostle says, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities of darkness,” he does not say, “We do not wrestle *in* flesh and blood,” for otherwise he would be removing the Christian faith from the gospel of the incarnate Jesus. The gospel of Jesus depends upon the incarnation. The whole Christian faith is incarnational. Thus, also your share in it is incarnational.

Jesus says in our text that – along with his death and resurrection – the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins is a “Thus it is written” of the gospel. And what is that preaching of repentance all about? Is it about a cerebral wrestling only? Or is it about a wrestling in flesh-and-blood against all forms of temptation? Doesn’t Paul say that the New Adam is at war with the members of his own body, which desire the things of Old Adam?

So then, as heirs of the resurrection, as those who have received the Holy Spirit in baptism, your life in Christ is anything but lower-case-s “spiritual.” Spirits have no flesh and bone, but

you – as your Christ before you – you do! And thus, for the sake of your inheritance in Christ, you must acknowledge the baptismal identity of that flesh-and-bone secondfruits of the resurrection. You must daily drown old Adam by disciplining and subduing the temptations he brings not only to thought, but also to word and deed. In other words, you must live as a Christian, act as a Christian, conduct yourself as a Christian, *repent* as a Christian... and – thanks be to God! – be forgiven as a Christian.

Yes, forgiveness may be described as a benefit for the soul, but then the next line of the Creed confesses that that forgiveness leads to the resurrection of the body. When we speak of forgiveness in Christ, we can sometimes feel distant and far removed from such visually experiential understanding of the resurrection that the disciples had. But we are equally heirs, and Christ cared for them, just as he cares for us: “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” Notice that: Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ; faith does not come by a spiritual euphoria that tickles the senses... In fact, what does our text say but that in their amazement, they “still disbelieved.” No, enthusiasm makes the Christian faith to flutter into spiritualistic nonsense. But, Christ preaches repentance and forgiveness, that the Old Adam may be subdued in all of the tangible truth of our wrestling with him.

Indeed, how does Christ strengthen us for such a wrestling, but by giving us His body and blood – that which spirit does not have. He gives us the forgiveness and strengthening of faith by providing us to partake of His very body and life.

Luther points out that the Sacraments are for both soul and body, for the soul delights in the Word as the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in that Word combined with the elements – “I baptize you” or “I forgive you” or “... given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.” Yes, the soul benefits from and delights in the spoken Word (faith created and sustained), for it cannot participate in bodily matters; but the body benefits from the tangible element – water poured over the head, the absolving hand upon the penitent’s head, the body and blood of Jesus eaten and drunk to receive the promise... the body delights in the tangible element, for the body is not spirit/soul and thus does not receive by faith, but by touching the element, touching the risen Christ.

So, the risen Jesus appeals to His own resurrected body and blood, that we might rejoice in our own “whole man” share in Christ’s resurrection.

Such does not mean we “experience” it this side of heaven. When we hear our first reading, Peter’s address at the

heels of his and John's healing of the crippled man, we may ask, "But, if the risen Jesus blesses me, why don't I get such healing?"

But where did Peter point the observers and hearers? – to Christ crucified and risen – there was their hope for both body and soul – and thus, Peter called to them, "Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things. About which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."

Notice where Peter points them: repentance and the forgiveness of sins, for the risen (and then ascended) Lord Jesus was still their help, hope and stay for body and soul, until that day that He will come again with the same risen body, the same nail-pierced hands, feet, and side, and restore all things, make all things new, reveal the new creation, raise our lowly bodies, and bring us in flesh and bone to be where he is.

Thus, wrestle in daily life and repent and live life not as a secular philosophically-minded pagan, but as one whose body and soul have been redeemed by Christ, adopted in Holy Baptism, and are fed and sustained by Christ's own body, blood... His very life. This is what it means to practice righteousness, as we hear in our second reading: "Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever

practices righteousness is righteous, as He (Jesus) is righteous.”
Such is no pietism – an outward righteousness for the sake of trumpeting your own faith. Rather, live as a Christian, dependent on Christ’s life to sustain yours, His body and blood to prepares yours for the same grave, the same resurrection through which He has gone... in short, live in Christ, for in Him, “Peace to you.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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