

Easter 3-April 14, 2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Acts 3:12-19 and Luke 24:36-48

"A Real Savior for Real Sinners"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you this day from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ who has risen from the grave for you. Amen

When we confess our faith as we will do again today, we confess that we believe in God the Father in the first article, God the Son in the second article and God the Holy Spirit in the third article. If the Apostles Creed had been written at the time when Luke recorded his account of Jesus' first appearance to his disciples on the evening of the first Easter, what is the main point that Luke records that Jesus wanted his disciples to understand about his resurrection that is also included in the Apostle's Creed?

You find this main point in the third article when we confess, I believe in the resurrection of the body. The resurrection of Jesus is not an idea or an image we have in our minds. The resurrection of Jesus is real, and Jesus persists until his disciples understand this truth about his resurrection.

Luke records in a little different way many of the same things that we heard John record about Jesus' first appearance to his disciples, which was the scripture from last week. Luke records the same four words that John recorded were said by Jesus when he appeared to his disciples. "Peace be with you." Luke recorded the same response of the disciples that John noticed. The disciples were startled and terrified. Luke recorded the same thing that Jesus did after his disciples expressed their fear by telling them to look at his hands and feet. In both gospels, Jesus encourages his disciples to look at the scars on his hands and feet and his side to see for themselves that he was who he said he was. Luke, however, adds the unique observation that the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost.

Can you recall a time when your mind and your sight may have played tricks on you? If you let your mind worry through the night, rarely does your mind have a clearer focus by morning. If what you are looking at isn't clear, rarely does your mind connect with what you were looking at and put your mind at ease. Like the disciples who thought they had seen a ghost were startled and terrified rather than comforted when they first saw Jesus who they also saw crucified.

Jesus takes the disciples to the next sense by telling them to touch what they are seeing. Jesus told his disciples to touch and see. Jesus assists his disciples' thinking process by reminding them that a ghost would not have flesh and bones. Now Luke tells us that the disciples had changed from startled and terrified and now were joyful in their disbelief and they were still wondering. Their minds were still creating doubt by what they saw, felt, and thought about. The disciples were not yet where Jesus wanted them to be. The disciples were not believing that it was the body of Jesus that had appeared to them.

Luke, as you recall, was a physician. Luke spent much of his time healing bodies. Luke was not a ghost buster. Luke didn't have a shop where people came to have their futures predicted by using crystal balls. Luke worked with real bodies. Luke records how Jesus moved his disciples from doubt to faith by demonstrating that his body had resurrected. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that his resurrection was not just an idea. Jesus wanted his disciples to believe in more than a movie about Heaven is for Real, Jesus wanted his disciples to know that Jesus is for Real and the evidence for this to his disciples would be that his body was not left in the grave but was standing right in front of them.

To bring his disciples closer to faith in his risen body, Jesus asks for something to eat. They gave him a piece of broiled fish and they watched him as he ate it. As Jesus ate the fish, it did not fall to the ground. It went into Jesus' body just as what happens when a real person eats. Luke does not record that the eating of the piece of fish was the final thing that made them believe that Jesus was for real. Jesus returned to the organ of their body that was used when Jesus first made his appearance when he said, "Peace be with you." Jesus spoke to them and reminded them that those were the words that he had already spoken to them. In fact, all of scripture from the law of Moses, the prophetic books of the bible, the psalms all pointed to this very event that Jesus is a Real Savior whose body was raised from the dead. Jesus opened all the scriptures to his disciples that day. Jesus did not send his disciples out into groups to think about what he had told them. Jesus was the preacher, and he didn't allow anyone else to speak or to give their opinion. Jesus' word was all they needed.

Now that Jesus' disciples had been changed from fear and disbelief to certainty, Jesus gave his disciples THE message to his disciples that they would proclaim to all nations. They were to preach repentance and forgiveness. The disciples had been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven and they were to go out and free all nations from their bondage to sin.

Now that it was clear that Jesus was a real savior whose body had suffered and died and rose again, the people that heard this message had to know that they were real sinners. The people that heard the words of repentance had to know that forgiveness is not just an idea that addressed fake sins or imitation sins. The repentance and forgiveness would be delivered to people who knew that their sins were real.

In the first lesson for today, we get an example of how Peter delivered this news of forgiveness from a real savior for real sinners. Peter is known for being bold and blunt in whatever he said, and his preaching style and delivery were the same. Peter didn't ease into their sin by bringing up some minor offenses such as mowing their yards on the Sabbath. Peter didn't bring up sins of omission by reminding them that they had failed to do something good for people. Peter gets up and addresses the crowd by saying, "You killed the Author of Life". You killed Jesus. Peter preached repentance but did not stop there. Peter added the word of forgiveness by declaring, "But his Father raised him up on the third day." Peter preached as he had been taught to do. Two real words. Repentance and forgiveness. A real message of salvation for real sinners.

We have been having the Lord's supper often lately. There is no bad time to receive this sacrament. In this sacrament, we see the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We feel it. We even tasted it. And in it we repent our sins and receive forgiveness. You might think that the hymn that we sing next "As We Gather at Your Table" is only about the Lord's supper. However, it doesn't even appear in the Communion section of the Cranberry Hymnal. It appears with the songs that are sung when people gather for worship.

We have gathered today, and Jesus is fully present. Not in flesh in blood that you can see and touch, but in his words proclaimed to you as forgiven sinners. The third line in this hymn reminds us that we can be fed by the words of Jesus. You have been nourished with Jesus' sacred story. The disciples did not believe this sacred story the first time that they heard it, and they were not ready to proclaim this good news to others until they believed in the resurrected body of Jesus. Many of you know the sacred story well. It has entered your ears so many times that you now claim it as your own. You are like the disciples who are no longer afraid, but rejoicing in faith knowing that forgiveness is real, and it is for you. Amen