

## Witnesses of the Resurrection

Luke 24:36-49

A professional wrestler, famous for his long, blond hair was getting a neck trim at the barbershop. *“You know,” said the barber, “I’ll bet no one would recognize you, if I cut off all those curly locks.”* *“I got news for you buddy,”* said the wrestler. *“I’ll bet no one would recognize you either!”*

Now, if I were that barber I’d be afraid to even touch the guy’s hair, lest he rearrange my face. Evidently that’s how the disciples in our text must’ve felt. They were hiding out in the Upper Room, because they were afraid of the Jews – deathly afraid that the Jews would not only rearrange their face, but rearrange their whole life, by doing to them what they had done to Jesus. In other words, they were lacking in faith. As a matter of fact, their faith was more like a dead corpse – as cold and lifeless as they believed Jesus to be. For even though they’d heard that Jesus was risen from the dead, they weren’t out looking for Him. They hadn’t gone to Galilee like He’d told them to do. Instead, they were hiding. So Jesus had to come and find them.

My friends, that’s good news for you and me as well, because in our fallen, sinful condition, we are very much like those disciples. On our own, there is no way that we can find Jesus. We don’t look for Him like we should. But in His mercy and grace, He comes looking for us. When we were lost in sin and shame, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and He found us with His undying love. And we desperately need that, because like the disciples in our text, we often like to play ‘hide and seek’ with our doubts and fears.

For example, our text says that they were startled or frightened. It’s a Greek word that means: ‘to flutter,’ kind of like a bird flapping its wings and flying away in fear. And all

too often, that's how you and I react when faced with responsibility. We try to fly away from it. Perhaps we're asked to work for the Lord in some way or help in the congregation, but we say no, because we don't want to give up something near and dear to us to serve Him sacrificially. Or we have the chance to speak up against an injustice, like abortion and euthanasia, or things like homosexual and heterosexual sin, but unlike Miss California, we keep silent. Maybe there's someone who needs our help, like a friend or neighbor, relative or shut-in but we stay away. Or we get the opportunity to witness about Jesus, but we run away from it. When we do that, we are just like the disciples in our text, hiding out behind closed doors, locked up in our sin and guilt.

Fortunately for us, even though we often hide out in our sin and run away from God, He doesn't run away from us or give up on us. Although He would have every right to lock us up in the dungeon of hell and throw away the key, He didn't do that. Instead, He came to find us, open up the prison cells and set us free, just like He did for the disciples in the Upper Room. They quickly found out that doors, which are shut or locked make no difference to the Risen Savior. He walked right through them and said: "PEACE BE WITH YOU!"

What a marvelous message, and just what they needed to hear. You see, the disciples already knew that Jesus was alive. Peter and the women had seen Him and told them all about it. And at the very moment when our text took place, the Emmaus disciples were reporting how Jesus had met them on the road. Yes, the disciples knew the Savior was alive. But they didn't really understand what that meant. People in those days often believed that the souls of the dead roamed the earth. So there was a great fear of ghosts. And quite possibly, that's what they thought Jesus was.

But Jesus dispelled that idea immediately, when He said: “A SPIRIT DOES NOT HAVE FLESH AND BONES, AS YOU SEE THAT I HAVE.” That’s why He invited them to touch Him, and why He ate in their presence. It was proof positive that He had risen bodily from the dead. And what good news that is for us, for it proves that He is true God, who paid the sufficient ransom for our sin and that He truly conquered sin and death, hell and the grave for us. As St. Paul said, if Christ didn’t rise our faith is in vain and we are still in our sins. In fact, many cults and false teachers still try to say that Jesus only rose in a spiritual sense. And so called Christian preachers say that He didn’t actually rise; that it’s just a nice concept. But our text proves beyond the shadow of a doubt, that He did in fact rise bodily from the grave, which means that our sins have been destroyed and one day we will rise to live with Him in heaven!

And yet, the disciples on that first Easter evening didn’t quite get it. They still had doubts. After all, even if Jesus was alive, they weren’t sure that was good news. Considering their terrible behavior on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, they may have been expecting a harsh, stern rebuke from the Lord. Imagine their surprise, when instead He gently said to them: “PEACE BE WITH YOU!” No harsh, stern rebuke, no hard feelings, just forgiveness and peace.

My friends, that’s the same way He greets us in spite of our terrible behavior! When we wander from His Word and stray into sin, when we run from our responsibilities, He still treats us with kindness and tender loving care. He gives us His peace, which surpasses all understanding – the peace of forgiveness and salvation. And that is especially comforting, because the word ‘forgive’ in our text is the Greek verb that means: ‘to dispatch or release.’ It was used to dismiss a council meeting or disband an army or dissolve a contract.

What a beautiful picture of the forgiveness that Jesus purchased for us by His death and resurrection. He has completely dissolved our sin and guilt. He has dismissed it and sent it away for good, so that it cannot come back to terrify us. Instead of holding onto it and throwing it back in our faces, He has disbanded it, so that it cannot attack us anymore. And that's what brings us peace – the peace of pardon and forgiveness that He lavishes upon us every time we read His Word and hear the absolution, every time we remember our Baptism and feast at His Holy Supper.

As a matter of fact, in the New Testament the word for 'peace' is a word that means: 'to tie together.' It refers to the separate beads of a necklace, which are all united together by one strand of string. So too, when our lives get scattered and disjointed like so many separate beads, all split up with fear and sin and sorrow, Jesus picks up our shattered lives and puts them back together again. He binds up our broken hearts and gives us peace, just like He did for the disciples in the Upper Room. And He does it over and over again in the Word and Sacraments.

The amazing thing is that the disciples had difficulty understanding that. Their sin and fears and doubts had so clouded their eyes that they couldn't see what Jesus' salvation was all about. They were looking for answers to their questions –like why did Jesus have to die? What happened to His body? What exactly had Peter and the women and the Emmaus disciples seen? But they were looking for answers in all the wrong places. They were looking within themselves for solutions, instead of looking to God's Word. That's why they couldn't see what Jesus was talking about.

But then: "HE OPENED THEIR MINDS TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES!" He explained to them how the Law and the prophets pointed to Him, that he had to

suffer and die and rise again for our salvation. And thankfully He does the same thing for you and me. That is the key, which unlocks the doors of doubt and breaks down the barricades of distrust in our heart. That is the only way to remove our fears and strengthen our faith, by daily reading and studying the Scriptures and weekly coming to God's House not only for worship, for the Word and Sacraments, but also weekly coming to Bible Class, so that the Holy Spirit can open up our minds to understand God's Word. That's the only way we can remain steadfast in our faith, and have the courage to share that faith with others.

After all, that's what Jesus has called us to do. In our text, He said: "YOU ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS." The church was not meant to stay in the upper room forever, but to go out and tell the Good News. That's what Jesus calls us to do – to witness about what He has done in our life to our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends. In other words, He doesn't want us to keep the peace and joy of our salvation to ourselves, but to freely share it with others.

It reminds me a little bit of the TV program, *Mass. M.A.S.H.* units began during the time of the Korean War. It stands for Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. This operation originated because too many wounded were being lost between the front lines and the hospital. So the army took the hospital as close to the front lines as possible. The doctors and nurses risked their lives to save others. The wounded were treated, stabilized, and sent to hospitals down the line for follow-up.

Now, the key word in M.A.S.H. is the word *mobile*. And the same thing is true with the Body of Christ – we are to be mobile missionaries, if you will, going out with the medicine of the Gospel to treat the wounded. After all, Jesus came all the way from heaven to earth and not only risked His life, but gave it up for us to heal our sin-sick souls with His forgiveness and

salvation. And He commands His church to go out and be His witness, proclaiming His name to all the nations. Wherever there are people who have not been baptized and who have not been taught about Christ, that is the place we are to go. And as our text says, He has clothed us with power from on high. That's what happened in our Baptism, when He filled us with His Holy Spirit, who grants us the gift of saving faith in Christ, keeps us in that faith all our days, and equips us to be His witnesses. May that dispel our fears and enable us to proclaim His Gospel, wherever He gives us the opportunity, until He comes again. Amen.