

Luke 24:36-49

Christ is risen! Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for this morning is from Luke's Gospel, "As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 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 for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

One of the things that I find truly remarkable is that we in the Church truly celebrate holidays very differently from the rest of the world. Or at least, we have the opportunity to. In the Lutheran Witness this month, there is an article that has missionaries describing how the Christians that they are working

with celebrate Easter and how it is different from other celebrations going on at the same time. Included in that article is something from Pastor Jastram, who we support, describing Easter in Japan. He makes the point that many people in Japan don't really know what Easter is about. I think we could say that there are many people in our own nation who don't really know what Easter is about.

Indeed, Easter is a rather peculiar holiday. We celebrate the resurrection of a man from the dead. That is something that's quite incredible. However, the world around us in our culture celebrates Easter for a single day. Unfortunately, too many Christians have decided to take their cue from the world as well and have elected to celebrate Easter in the same way. We get together in some pastel colored clothes for one day, eat a bunch of candy and eggs, and call it a holiday. But for us to take such a view of Easter is to miss out on the true depth and wonder of

this holiday that we are still celebrating. We don't celebrate for just one day, but we have the season of Easter. We celebrate Easter for weeks. We continue to proclaim that Christ is risen! Indeed, we will keep shouting that Christ is risen for weeks to come.

That's because this holiday isn't about bunnies. It's not about dyed eggs, and it's not about candy. It is about the only begotten Son of God who died in a very public and gruesome fashion raised to life. It is about the fact that in Christ, death itself lays defeated under his blood-stained feet. It means that his hands, still marked from the nails that pierced them, hold our very lives now and into eternity.

But even still, seeing this man who the disciples had given up for dead standing before them was a truly unexpected event. In fact, Luke tells us that some of them thought he was a ghost. Indeed, this is still the kind of thing that people today just won't

or cannot accept. Sadly, there are even people today who would claim to be Christians who deny the reality of this event. It is absolutely something that is outside of our normal frame of reference. We don't see people dying and coming back to life every day.

If we are honest, the resurrection certainly is something that is worth questioning. If we are to believe this, we should be making sure it's true. How did they know that it was really Jesus? Last week we read about the doubt that Thomas had and its resolution. But did Thomas really touch Jesus' wounds? The Bible doesn't actually say that he did. We know that there are all kinds of stories of people seeing dead relatives after that person is gone. If it's just a matter of seeing Jesus, perhaps the disciples were all suffering from some mass delusion.

But that's not what happened and our text today speaks to that. This is no ghost that the disciples saw. No, they came face

to face with the reality that Christ is risen! They stood face to face with the one who only a few days earlier had suffered all of the pains and agony of crucifixion on their behalf. His true, physical, resurrection is made certain when Jesus tells them to see his hands and his feet. Of course, we might say that his instruction to them is similar to Thomas, to prove that it's really him with the wounds and everything. While that is part of it, but there is also something more. If I were to ask you to picture a ghost in your mind, what does it look like? It very likely doesn't have feet. This is a common conception of ghosts that remains unchanged from the first century to now. Ghosts don't have feet. Jesus telling them to look at his appendages is proof that it is not just really him, but that it's him in the flesh. Truly, they saw that Christ is risen!

And if seeing his hands and feet isn't enough to convince them, Jesus asks the disciples if they have anything to eat. He

eats a piece of fish not because resurrection is hungry work, but so that he is able to show them that he is a real, physical being. He is proving to them, and to us, the validity of his resurrection.

This is far more than just a nice story. There is more at stake here than just whether or not we believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The very nature of God, our salvation, and eternity are at stake here. As St. Paul so rightly says, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has

been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

But we see that in our text today and through the witness of the Apostles that Christ is risen! And because he is risen, we joyfully and boldly proclaim this truth. Because he is risen, we can have confidence that the debt of our sins has been paid in full. Because Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, we can truly know who our God is. And because our Lord rose again, we can look forward to the day when all who follow him will be resurrected as well. Truly, Jesus has crushed his enemies under his feet, and through the faith that we have in him, his victory becomes our victory.

Truly, the importance of the resurrection for us is not simply that it happened a long time ago. It is something that is promised to us, today. It is something that gives us hope and gives us strength to face an uncertain and changing world. The

resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is what proves that this whole Christianity thing that we're doing is not simply some false belief. If Christ is risen, then we too will rise. If Christ is alive, we too are alive. If Jesus is Lord, he is our Lord. And this is something that's worth more than a day or two. It's something that we directly celebrate for weeks, but it is something that we are indirectly celebrating every week of the year. Indeed, every time that we as Christians gather together, we are gathering together precisely because Christ is risen and that means something.

But this thing that we know isn't shared by all. There are people in our own lives and even in our own families who would treat Easter as some little thing. This whole resurrection nonsense is just too much. And far too many Christians sit around wringing our hands at trying to figure this out. How can

we get them to believe? How can we help them see how important this is?

Well, Jesus himself has to come and open the minds of his disciples. To believe and appreciate the glory of the resurrection of Christ is something that is divinely begun. We in our lives are grateful witnesses of these things, and we testify to the truth that Christ is risen, but it is not our job to make or get people to believe. Rather, the Holy Spirit does that through his working by the Word and the Sacraments.

Thanks be to God that the minds of the disciples were opened that they would go out into the world and fearlessly proclaim this truth, even to the point of their own deaths. And thanks be to God that generation after generation of Christians have similarly had their minds opened by the Spirit to hear and believe and preach the Gospel so that you and I have been able to hear and benefit from this same good news that Christ is

risen! May we continue to be steadfast in this faith so that we can continue this proclamation for the next and coming generations. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting. Amen.