

St. Matthew's Church

NEW YORK CITY

THE EASTER GOSPEL AND MISSION

Luke 24:36-48

Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2009

In Luke chapter 24 provides us with a Resurrection triptych, (three parallel scenes from Easter Day). If each of these scenes were painted, the **first** scene would be a painting of the women in conversation with the angels at the empty tomb. The **second** scene would be of the two disciples on the Emmaus road, their hearts burning as they listened to Christ, unrecognized, explain the Old Testament Scriptures to them. And the **third** scene would be a painting of Jesus suddenly standing in the midst of his startled disciples on Easter evening. It is very likely that such a Resurrection triptych can be found in numerous old cathedrals, because the three parallel scenes are so obvious in Luke 24. All three scenes follow the same outline: first confusion, next rebuke, then instruction, and lastly witness.

In our Gospel lesson for today in Luke 24:36-49, we see the final scene of confusion bordering on pandemonium; The Eleven had gathered behind closed doors in Jerusalem where the Apostle Peter had amazed them by relating that he had personally seen the risen Lord. This was followed by the entrance of the couple from the Emmaus road with the report of their astounding encounter with Christ incognito, their burning hearts, and the grand moment of recognition when he broke the bread.

Jesus intended more than simply proving that he was a real live human. He began to tell them again of the purpose of his being human, even before the cross and resurrection. At the end of His work on earth, Jesus was bringing the disciples to the place where they would know the beginning of their work. Luke give this report: "Then (Jesus) opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:45-47).

In This Statement Jesus Highlighted Three Important Things: (1.) That He is the Messiah, and that His death and resurrection were not only real but also the way God is bringing healing and reconciliation to the earth. (2.) That repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be proclaimed. This would be a new twist on the old theme. They also remembered how much trouble Jesus got into for proclaiming forgiveness. But now that Jesus has risen, repentance and forgiveness always go together, and God's forgiveness is part of their proclamation. (3.) The third point is that this word is to go to all nations. This does not belong to the Hebrew nation alone. The word about Jesus and what God has done in Jesus goes to everyone.

Teaching from the Scripture: We must understand that one of the reasons Jesus taught them from Scripture was that He did not want them to rest their belief in His resurrection on their personal experience alone. He was not interested in their becoming an elite group with a special knowledge of Christ. Resting their faith on a miracle was not sufficient. He wanted them to ground their experience of His resurrection on the massive testimony and perspective of Scripture. Tragically, one can actually believe in the Resurrection and not believe in Christ. Jesus made this clear in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

As you can readily see this encounter was undoubtedly the ultimate teachable moment in all history. Jesus is seated, taking the traditional posture of a teacher, and as He gestured in the candlelit room His nail-pierced hands or wrists emphasized His point. No wandering minds here. You can be assured no one fell asleep during this sermon and falling out of the pew. His teaching was enhanced by divine illumination: "**Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.**" Though they had been His devoted followers, a spiritual veil had covered their understanding, so that on two occasions when He had foretold His death we read; "It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask Him about it" (Luke 9:45). And again; "The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what He was talking about" (Luke 18:34). But on Easter night the blinders were removed as the Holy Spirit opened their minds. What a dynamic combination, the Holy Scriptures illumined by the Holy Spirit. What they learned that night and in succeeding conversations during the forty days before Christ's ascension became the Biblical substance for the apostolic preaching of the Gospel and their apostolic mission.

That Easter night, privately locked up with the Eleven, Jesus grounded Gospel and Mission in the Holy Scriptures. He showed that the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms all taught His suffering, all taught His death, all taught His resurrection, all taught His mission to the world beginning with Jerusalem, the very heartland of the Jewish faith, the place where the incarnate Son suffered, died, and rose again. As the Law was opened, their hearts burned. As the Prophets came alive, the flames rose higher. And with the Psalms, their hearts became passionate, roaring furnaces. They became men of the Gospel! But it didn't stop there. Jesus also showed them that world mission was taught throughout the Scriptures.

- A. The Law:** The Law, the Torah, foretold this right at the origin of the Jewish nation when God said to Abram; "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3, 17:3-7). This was accomplished through his ultimate seed, Jesus Christ, as Paul explained: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). So Christ is the heir and mediator of the promise made to Abraham. And the blessing goes out to the Gentiles as they come to Christ and are incorporated into his body: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The nations of the earth are blessed with the spiritual riches of Abraham when they believe and preach Christ.
- B. The Prophets:** Mission is also found in the Prophets. In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas explain why they are turning to the Gentiles, and they quote from Isaiah 49:6 (a passage citing the task first given to the servant-Messiah but that is now the responsibility of his followers): "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:47-48). All Christ's followers are charged to aid in bringing light to the Gentiles and salvation to the ends of the earth.
- C. The Psalms:** This is also the ancient message of the Psalms. Psalm 22, which so graphically describes Christ's sufferings, ends with a statement of mission: "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the

Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before Him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27-28). The marvelous string of the five Psalms that declare God’s salvation to the Gentiles: They are Psalm 96; Psalm 97; Psalm 98; Psalm 99; Psalm 100.

The Gospel was and is for the world. We are to be Gospel men and women who proclaim that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3-4). Our message is not a philosophy. It is not even a way of life. It is the eternal good news based on historical events prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled by Jesus the Messiah. We are to preach Christ and Him crucified. The Gospel people are to be mission people. The gospel demands that we share Christ everywhere, and that we use our time and resources to go to the nations. It is a matter of life and death. It is about the glory of God.

The couple on the road marched back to Jerusalem to share what had happened along the way. And here Jesus made it formal: “You are witnesses to these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” He was promising the Holy Spirit, a promise reiterated at His ascension: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Gospel was advanced when the messengers were empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit was pleased to do His work of regeneration. As Paul testified to the Thessalonians; “Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

There is another statement of Jesus: “Peace be with you.” In all the post-Easter narratives, Jesus always bring this word of peace to the people He meets. It is the solid, real peace of God’s new realm, brought in by this Jesus who died and rose so that we can have life. Jesus’ word of peace comes to us as the fulfillment of all promises. In this simple phrase we can know in ourselves our power to proclaim, our grace to forgive, our capacity to love. It is a call to live as God intended. Let us do that.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld

His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And the Word has conquered death, hell, and the grave, and the Word is with you forever more. Peace be with you.