

Luke 24:36b-48

³⁶While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then 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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to

understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.

Last week, I asked the question, Why is it so hard to truly forgive someone, especially knowing that Jesus has given us the power and authority in order to do so? This week, I have a similar but different question, and that is the same question that Jesus asked His disciples in today’s gospel: “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

We all have fears. Fear of rejection, fear of loneliness, fear of losing a loved one. Why are we actually afraid? Hasn’t Jesus promised us that He will always be there for us?

One of my absolute favorite verses in the bible is Matthew 11: 28-30: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Being weary and burdened encompasses having fears. He will take your fears. He will take your burdens.

Even though the disciples of Jesus saw what had happened to Him, and even though they had been told many times, by Jesus Himself, that Jesus would rise again on the third day, they were still afraid when they saw Him. Today’s gospel states, “While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified and thought

that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

If the disciples were afraid and had doubts, even after being with Jesus and hearing His every word, it is only natural to assume that fear and doubt will happen to all of us. After all, we are in the position of not being able to hear the words directly from the mouth of the Lord. Rather, we must rely on our faith. And faith is the crux of this entire gospel.

In last week’s gospel, Jesus also appeared to His disciples and they did not readily believe it was actually Jesus. Both last week and this week, Jesus comes to His disciples, after being raised from the dead, to offer them peace. In

both cases, He also offers proof that He was raised from the dead, not just spiritually but also physically.

Last week, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on His disciples and gave them the authority to forgive people of their sins. But today, He does something different - He opens the minds of the disciples so that they could understand what He was saying. He needed them to understand WHY He died. WHY He rose again and WHAT they are supposed to do next.

Pastor Neal Halvorson-Taylor put it this way: “When I was a student, I gave high marks to teachers who, at the end of a lecture, would take time to go over the material again to make sure the students understood the main points. Jesus is such a teacher. At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, in the Nazareth synagogue, he proclaims the good news of his mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the

poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.” As the resurrected Jesus prepares the disciples to be “witnesses of these things,” he again teaches them about the fulfillment of the prophets and the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness. He goes over the main points of his mission, now theirs. It’s a mission by which to live and die and live anew—a mission that is now yours and mine.

So what is that mission, exactly?

First, we must believe. If we don’t believe that Jesus was the Messiah, then His death was in vain. If He didn’t die, then our sins are not forgiven. If we don’t believe He rose from the dead, then our hope for eternal life is worthless.

But, it is important to believe that He was raised from the dead not just spiritually, but also physically. That is why

He asked His disciples to touch His side and see His hands. That is why He asked for some food. He needed to show them that He was with them, physically. This is important, because it shows that our resurrection will also be physical.

Paul describes it like this in Corinthians 5: 51-54: “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

After believing, we are then instructed to repent and forgive, which was the main point of my sermon last week. See, Jesus, as a good teacher, reviews often what He wanted His disciples - and therefore US - to do. Believe, then repent and forgive. Once you have done this, Jesus has one more mission for you: You are called to bear witness to these things - the good news of the Resurrection. You are called to go forth and share this message.

Peter, having just healed a man who was lame from birth, demonstrated what we need to do in Acts 3: 12-19:

Peter said, “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had

decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Our sins, just like the Israelites sins, put Jesus on the cross. But, God raised Him from the dead so that we may be forgiven and have eternal life.

But, it is scary. We are still full of doubt. We are still frightened. But remember the verse from Ecclesiastes 3:1-10:

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from
embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

We don't need to be afraid. There is a time and place for everything. Fear is OK. Anxiety is OK. Having doubts is OK. But, we have been promised to never be alone. He will walk with us and talk with us whenever we ask. He will calm our fears. We are His, now and through all eternity. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,
As you promised, we are never alone. The Holy Spirit is with us at all times. You and your Son, Jesus Christ, are only a prayer away. We should be comforted of all our fears, doubts and insecurities by this mere fact. We need

courage to proclaim the good news as Jesus has commanded us, time after time, to do. He is the Messiah. He died for our sins. You raised Him from the dead. Our sins are forgiven and we will have eternal life through Him. That is the message of our faith. Ever strengthen that faith in us so that we can live without our fear, without our doubts and without our grief. Remind us that there is a time for all of those feelings, but we cannot let them overcome us to the point of not being able to live in this world that you gave us. In His name we pray, Amen.