

1John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36-48

First Presbyterian Church of Delanco, NJ
3rd Sun. in Easter, April 26, 2009

Moving Forward From the Resurrection

Our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead separates Christianity from all other religions. This belief is harder for some, easier for others.

There seems to be more evidence for believing that Jesus is raised from the dead than for not believing He is raised. There is no logical reason why any of the people in the Gospel story would steal His body. The Pharisees would have loved to produce His corpse and prove the Resurrection to be a rumor. But they could not.

It is impossible that the disciples might have stolen His body. After Christ's crucifixion, they are a broken, defeated, demoralized group who fear for their own lives. With the appearance of the risen Christ, these disciples are filled with a holy boldness which endures for the rest of their lives. The only way they can explain the Resurrection is to say that something supernatural and mysterious occurred.

At that time, the Greeks believe that in death the mind and spirit are freed from their bondage to the body. The Jews are more realistic. They believe the total being is capable of sin and God must redeem us completely – body, mind, and soul. In spite of his Greek background, Luke seems to emphasize the Hebrew view in terms of the unity of body, mind, and soul. It seems appropriate for Christ in His Resurrection form to be able to walk through walls, locked doors, and to eat fish.

Jesus Christ offers His disciples and us positive proof He is alive! Christ wants us to know He is our friend. Christ wants us to know God is on our side. The Old and New Testaments are the records of God's attempts from the beginning of time to convince us He is our friend and we can trust Him.

Faith is not belief in spite of evidence. There is much evidence of the truth of the Resurrection. The Resurrection is important for all the difficult experiences of our lives. Jesus Christ stays with us through job uncertainty, illness, loneliness, separation, and always. He loves us so much that He stays with us forever.

Luke outlines for us the bare bones of Biblical theology. He describes a program of worldwide evangelism. The disciples, now apostles, are the first witnesses of Christ's Resurrection; but through the power of the Holy Spirit, all believers are the caretakers of the truth of the Resurrection through the years. God pours out His Holy Spirit upon us at Pentecost. That Spirit is a present power in our lives. We are being healed, transformed, freed, and sent on missions because of the supernatural and awesome God living in and among us by His Spirit. If we need more positive proof, we have it in the many creative, bold, caring people throughout history whose only motivating force has been the risen Christ in their midst.

Luke's story records the surprise, fear, joy, and disbelief of the disciples as they react to the events of Easter Day. It also reminds us of the harder questions which thoughtful people might ask when the chords of the "Hallelujah Chorus" fade into quietness. Questions such as what was the

risen Christ like?; what is the meaning of Resurrection?; and how is Jesus present now? Luke describes the different steps Jesus takes in confronting the skepticism of His followers in a way to capture our interest and remind us these questions are not just ours. They are asked by those who know Jesus and follow Him even when He is alive.

What was the risen Christ like? In response to the fear of His disciples that they are seeing a ghost, Jesus does two things. He offers His hands and feet to be carefully examined by His disciples, and He eats a piece of fish in their presence. These two actions clearly destroy any idea that the risen Christ is a figment of their imagination. Jesus Christ is definitely not a ghost!

Jesus' presence is mysterious but real. This event is more than a resuscitation of the flesh; it is a Resurrection!

Examining Jesus' hands and feet and observing His eating apparently do not erase all the doubts which linger in the minds of the disciples. So Jesus takes a second step. He recalls the words spoken during His ministry, of how everything written about Him in the Scriptures would need to be fulfilled. Christ then interprets the Scriptures so His disciples can understand.

The meaning of Jesus' death and Resurrection comes only through the study of the Scriptures. No historical proof can convince anyone that in the final analysis death and Resurrection are the way God's promises are fulfilled. For Luke, the Cross and empty tomb are no more than surprising stories apart from the larger Biblical framework which leads to and explains what

they mean. What is critical about Jesus' Resurrection is not that it is a miracle, but that it brings to completion God's plans and purposes.

At the same time, the crucified and risen Christ becomes the clue for understanding the Scriptures. While the Scriptures provide the context for understanding Him, He provides the key for unlocking their mysteries. The two belong together.

The third step Jesus takes in the text is to spell out the mission which lies ahead for the disciples. All the ingredients are here: the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, the move from Jerusalem to all the nations, the disciples as witnesses, and the promise of divine power.

Perhaps the surprise for those of us who live on this side of the Resurrection, the meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus is connected not only to the study of Scripture but also to engaging in mission. Historical research does not take believers farther ahead. But involvement in the message of repentance and forgiveness does. Just as Resurrection and Scripture belong together, so also do Resurrection and mission belong together.

This also applies to us in our everyday lives. We, too, are to combine the study of Scripture with engaging in mission. By our reaching out to others who are in need, we model what we read about Jesus' reaching out to those to whom He ministers, the sick, the poor, the lonely, the marginalized, those rejected by others. Jesus' Resurrection brings His love and forgiveness to all who believe. We, in turn, reflect that love and forgiveness on those around us.

Christ dies so that we, through the Holy Spirit, might follow the Great Commission and continue to help do Christ's work here on earth. May we each model Christ's love and caring in our lives each time God presents us with opportunities and helps erase doubts from the minds of others.

I close with the words of Kathleen Hughes called *Alleluia* from "Disciples at the Crossroads: Where Do We Go From Here?"

May God sparkle in all of us as sunlight upon water,
May we radiate for each other compassion and hope,
May our work be fruitful, our joys profound, our pain redemptive,
May our discipleship be rooted in the very life of God.

May we be for each other, for family, for friends, for those in need, for those especially whose faith has come to staleness and whose hope has died

- a burgeoning ALLELUIA
- light and peace and simplicity
- full gratitude, full openness.

May we take nothing less for granted than the life we seek to build up in common.

May we suffer the pain of a fully generous love.
May we remain steadfast in the shadow of the cross,
And rise to meet the passion of this world
Relying always on the untiring good Spirit of our God.

Amen!