

Further Proof

If you have been here one of the last couple of weeks, you know that between now and Pentecost Sunday, we are looking at the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus. In looking at these passages we gain a better understanding what Jesus' followers felt and experienced in those first days after the Resurrection and in turn what those encounters have to tell us today.

If you were here last week, you may think we are looking at the same passage as find the disciples gathered behind a locked door on Easter evening. However, last week we looked at John's Gospel telling of this account. This week we are looking at it from the Luke's Gospel.

There are many similarities between the two accounts. The disciples are huddled behind a locked door, afraid of the Jewish leaders due to their association with Jesus. They are confused and not sure what to make of the Women's tale of the empty tomb. Jesus appears in front of them (not coming through the door) and shows the disciples that he is real and not their imagination.

Despite all of the similarities in the two accounts of this event, Luke's telling includes a little more information. In addition to showing the disciples the wounds in his hands and sides, he asks if they have any food. He proceeds to eat fish. This is further proof that he is real. That he is not a spirit or ghost, but flesh and blood. This is further proof that Jesus has truly been resurrected.

After Jesus finishes eating, he goes on to explain again to the disciples that it was necessary for him, the Messiah, to suffer, to die and to be raised from the dead on the third day...and he adds, and "that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." And that the disciples as witnesses of these things are being given the task of continuing Jesus' work... after they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The first question that popped into my mind when I read this passage was why was further proof necessary. I mean couldn't the disciples SEE that Jesus was real, flesh and blood? There have been beliefs about the nature of Christ that were deemed heresy's by the early church. One of these, called docetism, "is the doctrine that the phenomenon

of Jesus, his historical and bodily existence, and above all the human form of Jesus, was mere semblance without any true reality. Broadly it is taken as the belief that Jesus only seemed to be human, and that his human form was an illusion.”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docetism>

The further proof of Jesus eating fish added in Luke's Gospel allows us to state our belief that Jesus was both human and divine. He was not a ghost but rather was real.

Why is this relevant to us? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:12-14, “¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.” (NRSV).

If Jesus had not been resurrected and was real, the disciples would not have gone out and shared the good news of God's salvation through Jesus. The world was turned upside down because the disciples really believed that Jesus was real and raised from the dead.

The late theologian and preacher, Fred Craddock, said in his commentary on Luke that if Jesus who died really just belongs to the past and is not currently real, “then the Christian life can take on forms of spirituality that are without suffering for others, without a cross, without any engagement of issues of life in the world....” Jesus’ “pierced body bears witness against a mode of discipleship that does not endure scars on behalf of others.”

We are not called to a country-club faith or a uniquely American version of Christianity. We are called to a faith that follows Christ – and that may require some suffering on our part – on behalf of others.

The next thing that occurred to me as I read this account and I reflected on the other resurrection appearances of Jesus that we have looked at, is that Jesus teaches those to whom he appeared and that the response to Jesus’ resurrection is to tell – either of their own accord (as the disciples on the road to Emmaus) or at the direction of Jesus as in both Luke and John’s account of this event.

Jesus explained the scriptures and why the things that happened the last week before and including

Easter had to occur. The phrase that Luke uses in both the Emmaus account and in today's passage is that "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures." This is extremely important for us!

When we come to scripture – we need to have open minds. In order to hear what God wants us to hear, we need to put aside our prior ideas about what it is going to say to us and let it speak fresh each time. Let me give you an example. I had a conversation with one of my Sunday School teachers a number of years ago. We were going to use a junior bible trivia game as part of the morning's activity with some 1st and 2nd graders. The question on one card asked, what did Satan say to Eve in the Garden of Eden. I put the card aside to not be used and my friend asked me what was wrong with that question. I told her that Satan never appears in the story. She responded that of course Satan is there. I said, no, we have a talking snake, but Satan is never explicitly mentioned. Her reaction was what else have I made assumptions about in Scripture that are not actually there or correct.

I tell you that story not to make you reevaluate all of the childhood bible stories you learned, but to make you aware to read scripture carefully and

thoughtfully and with an open mind. One of my first ministers and the first senior pastor that I served under used to tell his congregation that I don't want you to believe something because I, in my role as pastor, have said it. I want you to read and study the Bible and decide for yourself. I want to say that to you also. Don't believe something just because I say it here from the pulpit. I want you to Read, Study and decide for yourself. If you aren't sure you agree with me or you have questions, I am always happy to have those conversations.

And when you have read and studied and decided for yourself, I pray that your response to what you have learned is just like that of the disciples those first few days after the resurrection – that you will go and tell. That you will proclaim that repentance and forgiveness of sins is available to all people everywhere.

The life of the Christian is not to remain behind the four walls of the church, but rather is to be lived out and shared with the world beyond the walls.