

April 7, 2024

Lesson 6: Power to Witness

Scripture: Luke 24: 36-53

Context:

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “Encounters in Prayer and Love,” where we look at how the spiritual discipline of prayer illuminates God’s presence in our lives. Today we start a new unit titled “Empowering Spirit,” as we examine how Jesus and the Holy Spirit led people to focus on spreading the gospel to languages where others could understand the gift of faith and grace. Jesus and the Holy Spirit did not hesitate to push the people of God to reach out of comfort zones and share the good news of how God came to save the whole world. Today’s lesson will focus on joining God in celebration because of Jesus’ resurrection.

The scripture lesson for today comes from the gospel of Luke. The gospel of Luke is one of the gospels to contain numerous resurrection appearances of Jesus. After the resurrection of Jesus, he comes to speak to his disciples to both confirm the resurrection as well as give them instruction and counsel. In today’s passage, Jesus gives counsel and then ascends to the heavens, commissioning the disciples for the days ahead.

The setting of the appearance is in Jerusalem. The gospel of Luke also contains the narrative of Jesus meeting disciples on the road to Emmaus. There is a different quality in this account as there is the corporeality of the risen Christ.¹ As seen by the response of the disciples, there is the initial question of if Jesus is a “ghost,” or in some texts, “an apparition.” Thus, Jesus does things a ghost cannot do such as eating fish and inviting them to touch him.

This narrative though also focuses on the risen Christ as one who was raised from the dead. It was extremely important for both the disciples and the early church to note Jesus died on the cross. If the Jesus who died belongs to the historical past but the one the disciples now follow is the eternal Christ, 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 this world, to focus on a living Christ.² Jesus dying and raising from the dead changes everything for the disciples and for us. Thus, he has them look at his wounds and touch them, remembering how he did indeed suffer and give his life for all.

The next section, verses 44 through 49, Jesus stresses the words he spoke to them in life and how now they are to go and make his name known to the world. He emphasizes how their instruction is rooted in the Jewish scriptures and they have heard him connect the scriptures to application. They are now to wait until he ascends and then they may begin his mission.

The last section, verses 50 through 53, culminate with a commission of the disciples. As they go to Bethany where he will ascend, Jesus blesses them. They sing in praise on the journey and after he ascends, they return home to Jerusalem in praise and thanksgiving. The Spirit will now come on them as Jesus promises and they will tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

¹ Craddock, Fred B. “Luke.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 288.

² *Ibid.*, 290.

Application

Something which is important to remember after Easter is we are still in what is known as the “Great 50 Days of Eastertide.” Often the lead-up to Easter Sunday focuses on the day when we gather with our community of faith and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We worship, reenact our old Easter traditions, and then return home to begin a new week. Yet for the disciples and for us, Easter is just the beginning. Easter Sunday is much like the tailgate party where we celebrate the game and then get ready to go out on the field for our Lord. As Easter dawns, we become resurrected people who have died to ourselves and been brought to life in Christ.

One of my clergy colleagues was telling me of how a new pastor is trying something new with their church as we begin Easter season. While they fulfilled all the checklists to prepare for Easter Sunday, they also asked their church what they should do in the community for Easter season. If God has given them new life on Easter Sunday, how might they share this good news with their community. Where is God giving new life in their community and how might they join in with where God is calling them to be resurrection people?

What a beautiful way to tie our lesson together today with such a practical example of what Jesus did with his disciples after his resurrection. We note how the disciples are all gathered in a room in Jerusalem, afraid of what is going on around them. Will they be next to be arrested and condemned for following Jesus? It is there Jesus shows up, saying “Peace be with you,” as if they’ve seen dead men rise from the dead before! Jesus calms them down though and then leads them through the scriptures with a plan to follow for who they are called to be in the world. The Spirit will give them what they need, and they will be filled with the peace of God.

As I reread this passage, I thought of how the resurrection of Jesus changes everything for us, particularly how we see the world. So often, like the disciples, we hide in fear and anxiety of what is out there in the world. Who will come after me? Will things change and will I be ready? I know of people who if you’re not worried, they will find something for you to worry about. It’s like they have a mission to be anxious or afraid!

Yet for Jesus, this does not connect to the blessing or commission he gives to his disciples. He tells his disciples to go out, to tell his story, and to go to all the nations, intermingling even with people they do not know. There is no concern about their fears or anxieties; simply a commission and a promise to be with him as they do his will.

So often it can be tempting for any church, whether on a local level or a denomination, to be consumed with details about how Christians do life together. There are preferences and ideas to be claimed, and conflicts to come about. Some of this comes with the territory of life. We all have ideas of the world and how things should be. In our minds and hearts, we have narratives we want to tell or things which are important to us.

Before we do anything though, we are called to be a resurrection people and to celebrate what Jesus has done for and in us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ invites us to celebrate and to worship the one who cared so much for the world, he died and then rose again, coming back to fearful disciples to remind them he was good on his promises. God invites us to look up and to see how the Holy Spirit is nudging us to be a resurrection people whose priority is to praise God and then secondly, seek ways to illuminate what Jesus is doing around us.

I have often thought of how much I love Easter being in the spring. It’s as if all of nature celebrates the mystery of the resurrection and it is done in different ways. Flowers bloom and the grass blades grow greener. The day is longer, and the skies are bright blue. And the animals come out and play, no longer hidden in hibernation.

Jesus invites us to do the same thing in the season of Easter. We are to be out rejoicing in our way and finding people to celebrate alongside. There is no time for fear and anxiety; only time to rejoice at the new life God gives us. Jesus wants us to celebrate his resurrection and to find all the ways God might be calling us and our communities to receive the risen Christ.

How do you celebrate the great fifty days of Easter? What might God be inviting you to do in your community to magnify the risen Christ? Who exhibits the joy of Easter in your life? How does resurrection change how we see the world? What is a way you will celebrate the risen Jesus this week?

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