

May 14, 2017 “Step Three” Luke 24:36-49

We have been spending time since Easter looking at the resurrection experiences of the followers of Jesus. The point is that the resurrection of Jesus is believed because of the overwhelming evidence that it happened. And what that really means is it was not a one-time experience. We are now far enough into the experience of the disciples of appearances of our resurrected Lord that there are things to notice about their coming to grips with the reality that it is true. The signs are all there. They struggled with the believability of Jesus having risen from the dead. And I will be saying more about that as we go along. It will become a refrain in this study of the resurrection of Jesus.

In this second to last portion of the Luke 24, we are dealing with the 3rd experience. First the women went to the tomb and were told Jesus had risen by an angel. They obediently shared with the disciples what they had seen and heard at the tomb. As a result John and Peter ran to the tomb and found it empty. They did not encounter the angel. They saw the linen shroud, folded and left inside the tomb and their state is described more as confusion than faith. They did not know what to make of the whole thing...and they did not believe the women...because they were...men. That is their confession.

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Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, tradition says it was Luke the author of this gospel, they decided to go home. The story of their encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus is the second sighting of Jesus risen from the dead. It gives us pause, because they did not recognize HIM. Most of us want to know more about that than the gospel record tells us. How come? They had spent three years or the balance of that time walking with HIM, listening to HIM, pursuing HIM. So how come it takes HIS breaking of the bread at dinner, passing bread to them, for them to suddenly know who it is they have been listening to as HE opened the Scriptures to them. Then.... Poof! He disappears. And they are so certain of His resurrection they hike it back to Jerusalem to tell the rest of disciples. That is the second experience.

And I need to remind us all that Cleopas, Luke and the balance of the gathering in the upper room, did not call themselves Christians. They still refer to themselves and will consistently through the balance of the New Testament documents as “the disciples of Jesus”. It is important to notice that these centuries later when we do refer to ourselves as Christians, what we mean is, we are Jesus disciples in this time. Followers, learners, servants, workers who are in fact serving the King of Kings.

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This morning we turn to the 3rd experience concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Cleopas and Luke have returned to Jerusalem. It is what we would call the late evening of Sunday, which is forever the day of resurrection. They have found the balance of the 11 and a larger circle of disciples in the upper room. Their intention is to testify to the gathering that they have seen the Lord. That the women had it right. HE is risen...praise God! But as happens when we deal with the living God, the tables are turned. That upper room gathering tells Cleopas and Luke that Peter has seen Jesus. In fact they won't let Cleopas and Luke get a word in edgewise.... Until they have heard their excited testimony. Finally, Cleopas and Luke get their turn .

And while they were still talking about this... the Emmaus Road experience... unpoof... Jesus stood among them and the first thing HE said to them was "Peace be with you." Jesus never speaks amiss, and there is always good reason for what HE says. HE says, "Peace be with you!" because the disciples are not at peace. They are agitated. They are excited. And clearly they are still trying to answer the question...how can these things be! Luke says to us that they were startled. That they were frightened. They think they are seeing a ghost.

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And it is neither a peacegiving experience nor is it an uplifting experience. They are scared.

I can only tell you I respond to those words. I find it very helpful. I find it very encouraging. Because frankly I find a lot of the experience of being a follower of Jesus....startling. Frightening. And sometimes I wonder what I have gotten myself into. People say to me all the time... You have so much faith! And there are moments when I do. But there are moments when I am shaking in my shoes and wondering what is going to happen next. Because it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And frankly...people who say they never have doubts, never have fear, are both simple and arrogant. I seek to foster faith in Jesus. I seek to foster greater faith in Jesus. But I am telling you I am not made of steel or granite. And I take great comfort that people of the quality of Cleopas and Luke and the eleven were startled and afraid when they realized Jesus who had been crucified, dead and buried, was suddenly there and among them.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. His next words were..."why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your minds?" I keep saying that the KJVersion of the Bible is the most accurate word for word translation of the Scriptures we Protestant Christians use. Here is what the KJV says here.

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“Why are you troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Clearly thoughts that have to do with doubting...(is this a ghost)?

Jesus offers the only antidote HE knows. And while I am quoting the KJV here, our pew Bibles essentially say the same things. “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.” Look. Here are the nail prints, there are the nail prints. I am your crucified Lord! Handle me and see, for a spirit...a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Evidence boys and girls. Hard evidence. There are the wounds that caused me to die on the cross. Handle me. I am real. Flesh and bones. Handle me.” He shows them his hands and his feet.

Our pew Bibles describe their reaction. It is a reaction not a response. They react. “And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement...” They are confused. Happy on the one hand for what they see and feel as they handle HIM, but amazed as in...how can this be? Am I dreaming? Here is what the Oxford Dictionary says is the meaning of being amazed. “Overwhelmed with wonder.” That is what the word means. They hear and they see and they feel HIM but they are having trouble processing it all. I say again.... I find this encouraging. I would like to think if I had been there

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by now I would be convinced. The fact is we are so like these disciples it is amazing. I would like to think by now I would be a believer... in fact...if Luke is having trouble with all this... probably I would too.

And because Jesus can see what is in their minds and hearts, HE says, “Do you have any food here, anything to eat?” They hand him a piece of broiled fish. And Jesus eats it, and even as HE is eating he continues to teach them. “This is what I told you while I was with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. “ And I picture Luke giving Cleopas a dig in the ribs and saying to him, HE told us that in Emmaus. He said that in Emmaus.

And Jesus, Jesus risen from the dead does not leave it there. He tells them, “This is what is written. The Christ will suffer (read Isaiah 53) and rise from the dead on the 3rd day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations. I have said this before, remember, remember, remember, the disciples, the church did not invent the prophecies concerning the Messiah nor the interpretation we accept about them. They are part of the Old Testament, Jewish heritage of the Law and the Prophets. What Jesus tells the disciples is every one of those prophecies has to be ticked off,

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as fulfilled... because I am who I am. That too we recognize in our best moments of faith and faithfulness.

Peace be with you. Be not discouraged by the difficulties between what is called rational thought and faithfulness. Peter and James and John and Luke and Mark and Matthew... they too were amazed by these things. But we come to the same conclusion to which they came. The Lord is risen. HE is risen indeed!!

Let us pray;

Lord we confess we react very much like the disciples you faced in the upper room. We may indeed wish we could have been there to see what they saw and experience what they experienced. Grant us the experience of your presence that we might find our faith confirmed in times that test us, in circumstances that we find difficult and filled with fear. May your Spirit ever warm our hearts to desire this one thing...to follow YOU wherever you would lead us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen