

## **Sermon on Luke 24:36-49 “Kingdom Hearts”**

**Natasha Vedder (Fleetwood CRC)**

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We took a couple weeks break from Luke’s post-Easter narrative, the events after Jesus’ resurrection. So, here we are again, ready to explore what continued after that Emmaus road & eye opening experience for the two who were walking and suddenly encountered Jesus. They of course returned to Jerusalem and shared their experience with the disciples in the upper room. And it’s in that moment, while they were all still together, that Jesus appeared among them.

Imagine for a moment that upper room scene. Maybe take a second to close your eyes and consider...what would the room have smelled like? What food would have been on the table? The feel of the rug on the floor you’d likely be sitting on? And I wonder what kind of energy was in the air as the disciples talked with the Emmaus road folks...skepticism? Excitement? Confusion? Was there tension? Unity?

And then, **“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” (Luke 24:36)**

Even though a greeting like that was common in the culture, my sense is that Jesus knew what to expect in this room. He knew his presence might frighten them or catch them off guard. He knew they were still reeling from the events that happened. He knew they had been afraid and were now confused.

So his first word to them is peace. Peace for their fear and confusion. But also peace, a reminder of what life after Easter is all about.

John’s account of this story tells us that the disciples were hiding in that upper room, behind locked doors in fear. Jesus, in his post-resurrection body, has this amazing ability to appear in their midst despite the locked doors. There is something different about this Jesus, and so he needs to assure them that he is not a ghost. He addresses their confusion head on: “Look at my hands and feet” - to show them his crucifixion scars. And then “It is I myself”. He just tells them, it’s really me! And then he invites them to touch him, because ghosts wouldn’t do that. And then they still don’t believe him due to their joy and amazement, so he goes a step further and asks for a snack! Ghosts don’t need to eat. He took the fish they offered him and ate it in their presence.

Jesus could have chastised them, rebuked them, but he doesn’t. He meets them where they are at in all their confusion, amazement, and even joy, and simply addresses their needs for clarity and proof that he is their Jesus.

This is the Jesus they knew. And isn’t this the Jesus we know, too? **Jesus responds to our fears and doubts.**

What locked doors are we hiding behind? What personal fears can Jesus address in your life? Maybe it's the fear of a certain diagnosis, unemployment, loneliness, or loss. Or Maybe it's a national fear for security in the midst of wars. Many of us fear death.

These fears hold us captive. These fears prevent us from being fully who we were made to be! These fears keep us, just like the disciples, from witnessing the joy that is ours, the good news that death could not hold Jesus back, he is alive.

### **How are we needing to be released from our fears in order to be a bolder witness to Christ's resurrection joy?**

The resurrection started a process of transformation in the disciples and Jesus' followers. They weren't always bold and fearless...but we see in the book of Acts, which immediately follows these events, that this group of fearful, anxious, confused followers are transformed into bold, fearless, and confident in their message, in their joy, and in their calling to go into the world with the good news.

The resurrection transforms us, too. How have you seen this transformation happen in your own life? Where has Jesus released you from fear, anxiety, or doubt, in order that you can be confident in your faith and sure of the things we hope for?

Jesus' presence moved the disciples from their fear, alarm and confusion to joy mixed with disbelief, and then eventually to minds and hearts that understood the resurrection in light of the Scriptures.

### **He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."**

You might have noticed something different about this verse, compared to other parts of Luke's Gospel. Luke often quotes specific texts from the Old Testament to show the Jews how Jesus was fulfilling specific prophecies. And quite often when Jesus talks about the fulfillment of the Scriptures, he refers to the law and prophets. But here, he also adds the psalms. With this addition, he is referencing the whole of the Jewish Scriptures: the law, prophets, and psalms are what make up the entirety of the Jewish Scriptures. Luke's intention isn't to explain a specific Old Testament text being fulfilled in the resurrection, but that all of Scripture finds its meaning in Jesus, especially the passion and resurrection.

He could have explained how the resurrection all came about, how it worked, given a theological explanation. But instead he chooses to remind them of the bigger story of God at work in the world, and how He fits into it, and then, eventually, how they fit into it.

Jesus opens their eyes to the grand drama unfolding in front of them. Closed minds can be opened! The peace of Christ came to fruition in their hearts and allowed them to really see what

is going on. They had seen the Scriptures being fulfilled, but in Jesus' post-resurrection presence, they now understand it.

How has the presence of Jesus helped you to understand the Scriptures in all their fullness and beauty?

Many Biblical scholars describe Scripture in 6 acts - we are currently in Act 5. Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen describe it this way: The story starts with God establishing his Kingdom - the story of Creation. Then there is rebellion in his Kingdom - the story of the Fall. Then God, the King, chooses Israel and redemption is initiated. In Act 4, we see the coming of the King and redemption accomplished. And this moment here, in Luke 24, marks the beginning of Act 5 which is the mission of the church. In this moment of understanding that Jesus brings to the disciples gathered there, they begin to understand this story, and their place in it.

**Act 1: God establishes the Kingdom - Creation**

**Act 2: Rebellion in the Kingdom - Fall**

**Act 3: The King Chooses Israel - Redemption Initiated**

**Act 4: The Coming of the King - Redemption Accomplished**

**Act 5: Spreading the News of the King - The Mission of the Church**

Jesus' life doesn't just help us understand the Scriptures though. Jesus' life compels us forward into the future. We wouldn't be gathered here today if the disciples only understood the Scriptures with their minds. They let the presence of Jesus, the joy of the resurrection, and their understanding of their place in God's story move them forward into the future as witnesses of this story!

The thing about witnesses is that they are compelled to speak and act based on what they have seen. Last week I was walking along 160th street and witnessed a 3 car accident happen right in front of me. I was the only one around who would have seen what happened as clearly as I did. So I stopped. It didn't appear anyone was hurt, but I wanted to check in with the drivers and pass on my contact info in case they needed a witness as to what happened. There was a fair bit of damage to the front two cars. Sure enough, several days later I got a call from ICBC asking me to share my version of the story to help fill in some of the gaps. I was happy to do it. Truth needs to be spoken. I think most of us, if we found ourselves in that situation, would want to do the same.

Jesus reminds those gathered in the upper room that they are witnesses of the Messiah's suffering, death, resurrection, and reconciling work in the world. That is the story to which they are called to witness. And because those first disciples actually experienced the story first hand, they were compelled to speak and act on it.

But first, before they do that - Jesus says wait. Stay here in the city. I'm going to send you a gift from my Father. Wait for the Holy Spirit, so that you will be clothed with power from on high.

The first act of the church is waiting. They have been made aware of their mission. But first, they must wait.

(Include summary of Acts 1/Mattias chosen to replace Judas/how they don't actually wait but get busy with administrative tasks?)

The kind of witnessing the church is called to is different from witnessing a car accident and telling your version of events. You see we can't witness without the Spirit. We don't witness without the Spirit. It is the presence of Jesus that enables us to understand the story we are witnesses to, and it is the power from on high that sends us out, empowers us to be the witnesses that we are called to be.

### **Jesus sends his church**

Each of the Gospels end with Jesus commissioning, sending his church, and Luke is no exception. And it's important that we recognise that Jesus is commissioning a community. Often these passages have been interpreted as reasons for the sending of missionaries to the mission field. But this is our communal commissioning which shapes our identity as God's missional church, God's people, God's community. It isn't the start of something new. Jesus doesn't start the story. Jesus is Act 4. Jesus is God's plan for a story he started with Creation, a rescue plan for a world he created, loved, and carried to this moment, despite its failings. And then, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection continue that story, launching God's people with a renewed vision of what they are about - what they have always been about.

To understand this vision, to grasp our identity and essence as a church we turn to the Scriptures, this grand story. We let the images of the Bible shape us, rather than the images of the world and culture around us. This is why we ought to be continually immersed in the Scriptures. This is why we ought to check in and ask ourselves often, what story is shaping our understanding of our identity? What images are forming us?

And we can start with Jesus, because he is the fulfillment of all the Scriptures. It is Jesus who brought the good news we all so desperately need to hear: the Kingdom of God has arrived. This is a cosmic plan with cosmic implications. God's kingdom is being ushered in through Jesus. We often forget that the good news didn't start with the cross. Jesus began announcing his purpose, and God's plan, as soon as he began his public ministry work. The Jews, whether they believed him or not, understood his lingo, because they were waiting for God to act through the work of an anointed king. It was just so astonishing how Jesus came, and what he taught and did, that it was almost unbelievable. But thank God, a few believed. Jesus began his work of gathering a few dedicated disciples who would partner with him in making God's kingdom known in the world. They thought the plan was cut short with Jesus' sudden and devastating death, but within days the fullness of God's plan was revealed through Jesus' resurrection and within weeks, the confidence of the early disciples grew, based solely on their belief that Jesus was truly alive.

We'll reflect more on Jesus' ascension and reign next week and so I won't spend time on it now. But we know how the story will end, because Jesus promised to return, and bring everything to completion. Revelation gives us all kinds of pictures of the newness and completion that is to come, the day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ as King and Lord.

But we are in Act 5. We are here living in this world that God is making new, 2,000 years after that first commissioning of God's Easter people, given the task of being in the world as God's unique people, a community gathered by God to show the world who God is and what he has done and is doing.

This is not just a task for missionaries, or those gifted in evangelism, those given the passion to preach the gospel on the street corners. This is our identity. This is our purpose. The very essence of the church is to be missional. It's actually almost hard to believe that we are God's plan - that we are who he has chosen to continue his reconciling work in the world. But it is right there plainly in Luke 24:

**“The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:46-48)**

The healing, forgiveness, and grace that Jesus brought WILL be preached to all nations. We are witnesses of these things. The Spirit empowers us, and we are compelled to act.

I spent some time thinking through what type of song would best help us respond to this message. Many of the songs that reflect on our calling as a church use the language of going, preaching, being sent. And those things are all true, but they can lead us to believe that we need to do something drastic, go someplace far away, to preach the good news, rather than understand that it is our very identity to be missional, just in how we exist in the world as God's people. So, as we sing these words now, let us remember that it is WE who go to the world, not me who goes to the world. We go together in the Spirit's power. Let us remember that it is our transformed kingdom hearts that God desires, and that shape how it is we are in the world, and let us remember Jesus, the only name that has power to save, to respond to our fears and doubts, to bring peace, and to reconcile the world to the fullness that God desires.