

Third Sunday of Easter 2006

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

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/beaster3.htm>

Luke 24:36b-48

In Luke's account of Easter, the risen Christ is not seen at the tomb. Rather he is first experienced as two followers (one of them named Cleopas, the other unnamed) are joined by someone they don't recognize as they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This passage immediately follows that story. While they are talking about what has happened, Jesus "stood among them." In broad terms, four things then happen: (1) Jesus demonstrates that he is not a ghost; (2) he reminds them of what he has already taught them and "opens their minds" to understand that the Christ must suffer and rise on the third day; (3) he commissions them to be witnesses and proclaimers to all nations; and (4) they are to wait until they receive power from on high.

1 John 3:1-7

Again John kinda confuses the heck out of us by seeming to say that either you are completely in the light, and not sinning; or you are a sinner and do not know God / Christ.

Sermon in a Nut Shell

Jesus is trying to open our minds to understand in a new way what the scriptures say about the eternal nature and character of God. God is not just a bigger, better king up in the sky who will one day wipe out all the bad guys. That is old news, not good news. The good news is that God is love; powerful vulnerable love; undying love. And this is what has always been true about God.

Jesus doesn't show up to simply take back his old job of leading his sheep. He doesn't hang around so we can follow. No. He comes back so that we can know for sure that what he told us last week was really real, and then he says, "Over to you." "Once you were followers and learners, now you are my witnesses and proclaimers of the eternal character of God's forgiving nature. Over to you. Beginning with Jerusalem and then to all peoples. Over to you."

Sermon Thoughts (Not the Sermon)

Over to You

The passage from Luke, following the story of the walk to Emmaus, is the final scene in Luke with the risen Christ.

Luke is a physician, and as elsewhere in his Gospel, he stresses the physical. (For example, Luke says "Blessed are the poor ..." whereas Matthew says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit ...") Whatever it was that the followers of Jesus were experiencing, Luke – who would have experience with dead bodies – makes it very clear: this ain't no ghost. This is really real. Except of course, that the really real risen Jesus does not now have a physical body that behaves like every other physical body. What is happening is really real. But it is also a new normal, a new kind of "real."

Now one of the things we should know from elsewhere in the Bible, when God shows up to bless you, you might want to consider turning and running as fast as you can in the opposite direction. Because the blessings of God are always given for a God-sized purpose. Abraham and Sarah are blessed with many descendants in order that they would be a light to the nations of the world. When Jesus begins his ministry by quoting Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me in order that ..." good news will be proclaimed to the poor, to the lame, to the blind, to the imprisoned. So, if

you don't want to wind up with a God-sized calling on your hands, watch out when God shows up to bless you. Let's see what happens in this story.

The first few verses establish that Jesus is not a ghost and get the disciples to get over their fear and astonishment. But the point of the story is not: Jesus is risen! Hallelujah! Though that in itself would be pretty good news indeed. Verse 44 tells us that Jesus is back for a different reason than merely strutting his new clothes:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.”

And he then goes on to “open their minds” to understand the scriptures.

Now I don't know about you, but I take great comfort from the fact that even the disciples did not get it the first time round. That Jesus has to go over – one more time – “my words that I spoke to you” (only last week actually).

So what was it that Jesus spoke to us last week – the week just before his betrayal, arrest, torture, sham trial, abandonment, and execution? Before all that happened, didn't he tell us something about how the Messiah would be betrayed, arrested, tortured, falsely tried, abandoned and executed on a cross? He did.

And Luke's emphasis on the really real physicality of the risen Christ is to try and say as plainly as can be said, that the words spoken to us by last's week's really real Jesus were as real as real can be. Jesus was not just talking about fantasy; was not just magically predicting the future. He was revealing to us something really true about the eternal nature and character of God that we did not get then, but have a second chance to truly understand now.

You see last week we were still hoping that God was a bigger better Cesar, a bigger better king who will come down and use force to overthrow the bad guys and run the earth the way we know the earth should be run (“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”)

But there are at least two problems with this hope. The first is that we know from our own experience that simply changing the regime does not change the enduring power system. Yes, it is important who gets elected, but even when “my” side wins the election, the underlying power dynamics do not change – there is just a temporary slight shifting of who wins and who loses. And that's the problem. Simply having a bigger better king who wipes out all the bad guys is still the same old story. It is old news, not good news. The other problem with this hope is that it is false. It is a completely wrong understanding of who God is; of God's enduring nature and character.

But even though Jesus explained this all to us last week, we still didn't get it. And so when he was arrested, tortured and executed, we thought that was it. We thought the same old story was still the only story, and that one more time, God had mysteriously not done his all-time powerful magic trick of overthrowing the bad guys. Once more the bad guys had killed the good guy. End of story. The only news is still the old news. Or so we thought.

But it turns out Jesus knew what he was talking about last week. What was it he told us?

The Messiah, the Son of God, must suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. Now you can either hear that as an amazing magic trick of seeing into the future. Or you can hear it as Jesus telling us something profoundly new-to-us about the eternal nature and character of God. The fact that Jesus came back from death specifically to go over this again makes me think that the latter is the correct choice. Jesus is trying to open our minds to understand in a new way what the scriptures say about the eternal nature and character of God.

God is not just a bigger better king up in the sky who will one day wipe out all the bad guys. That is old news, not good news. The good news is that God is love; powerful vulnerable love; undying

love. And that God has all the power that love has; not the power that death and fear have. And this is what has always been true about God.

God forgives! Therefore repent and believe. That is the good news that Jesus wants us to truly know in the depths of our being. (Note that I am NOT saying: believe and repent and then God forgives. God forgives without conditions or actions on our part. So. Why not stop living the old way, and start living as we are: forgiven and loved by God.)

Now this where the part about God showing up to bless you comes in. Because Jesus doesn't show up to simply take back his old job of leading his sheep. He doesn't hang around so we can follow. No. He comes back so that we can know for sure that what he told us last week was really real, and then he says, "Over to you."

"Once you were followers and learners, now you are my witnesses and proclaimers of the eternal character of God's forgiving nature. Over to you. Beginning with Jerusalem and then to all peoples. Over to you."

There are so many Christians in the world today, that we sometimes don't really hear Jesus saying, "Over to you." We sort of hear it as, "Over to those other Christians – the evangelicals." And surely Jesus doesn't mean that **we** are to proclaim the good news to the **whole world**? But you know, back at the time of this story from Luke, Jesus was probably speaking to about as many people as are gathered here today. He is speaking to us today. "Beginning here in this place, it is over to you – us – to witness and proclaim God's forgiveness."

Oh, let's also remember to wait for the power from above. You see this is the other thing about being blessed by God. Whenever God blesses, we must wait till God provides the means – the power – and not try to do it on our own. Working on a God-sized mission needs God given gifts and God given power to accomplish it. Doing it on your own is a guarantee of burn out.

So. The really real reality of the resurrection is Luke's way of telling us to believe what no one has really believed was real: God is love – powerful, vulnerable love (and not a bigger better Cesar). This is the good news of Jesus Christ.

Did you get it this time?

Over to you.

Amen.